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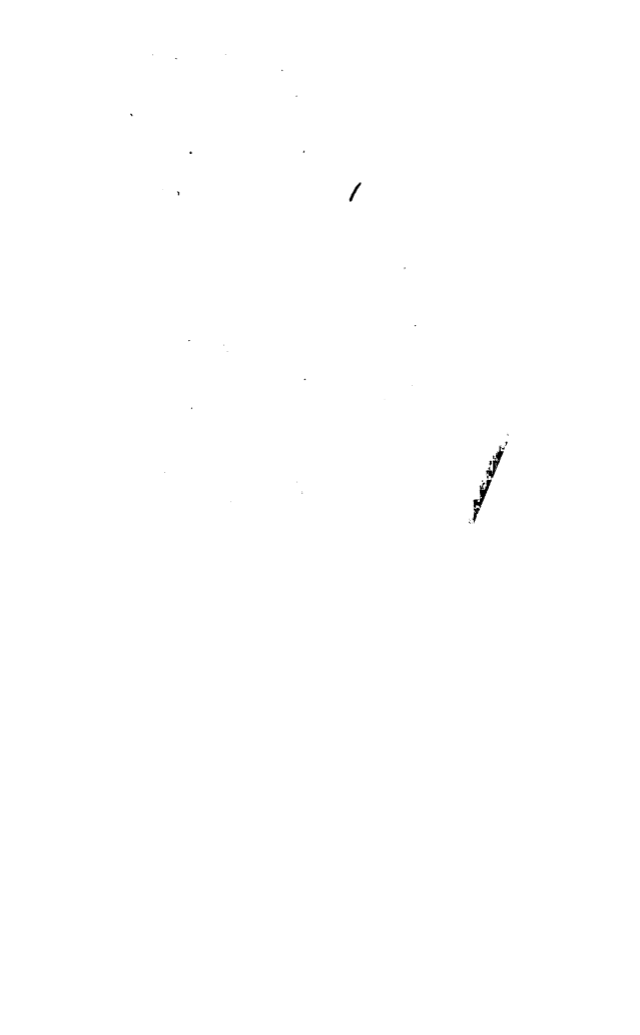
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BURNS





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(Burns)

NDD



THE
LETTERS
OF
ROBERT BURNS,
CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED

Printed by T. DAVISON,
Whitefriars.

THE
of
LETTERS OF BURNS.

VOL. I.



A. Nasmyth pinx.

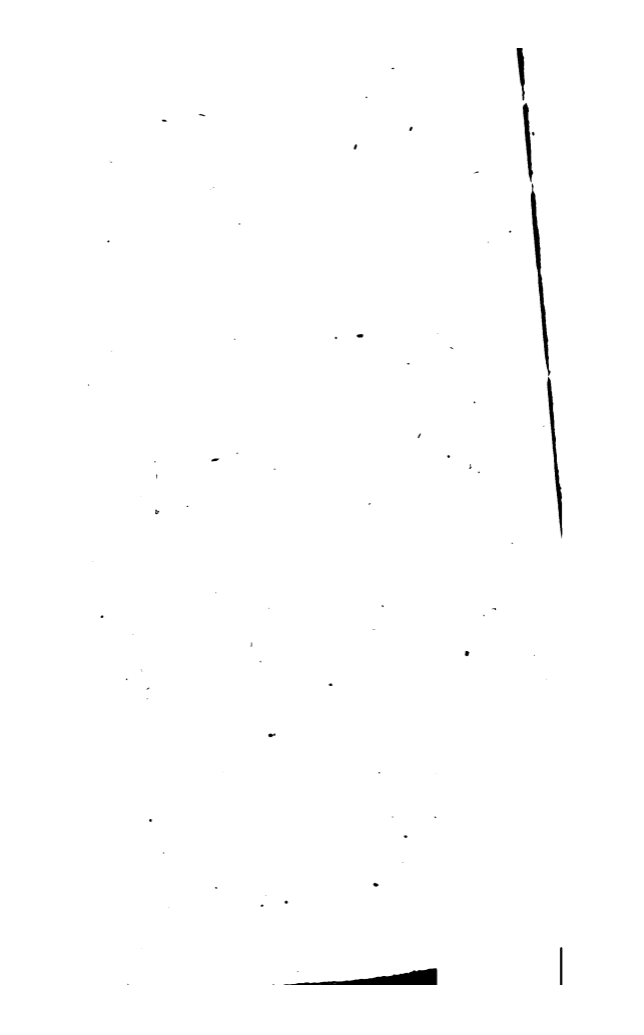
G. Murray sc.

LONDON. PUBLISHED BY JOHN SHARPE, PICCADILLY.

1819.

NOTY • 1950
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THE Poetry of BURNS has had such an extensive circulation as to occasion no little surprise that the LETTERS of the Bard could not hitherto be procured without the re-purchase of the poetical volumes, already in the hands of the greater part of his readers; some accommodation, it is presumed, that part of his readers will acknowledge, from the publication of the present volumes. It is not necessary to repeat the biography of the Poet in this place: it has not only been condensed from Dr. Currie's Memoirs, and prefixed to all the later editions of his Poems, but is told by Burns himself in the twenty-sixth Number of this edition, so as to leave nothing to be wished for in a classical edition of his "LETTERS."



LETTERS
OF
ROBERT BURNS.

I.

TO HIS FATHER.

Irvine, Dec. 27, 1781.

HONOURED SIR,

I HAVE purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year's day : but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder ; and, on the whole, I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past wants, nor look forward into futurity ; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast, produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity ;

but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought, that ere long, very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

“ The soul, uneasy, and confined at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.”

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations,* than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me, for all that this world has to offer. As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me: I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to

* “ 15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

“ 16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

“ 17. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it is yet too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Muir; and with wishing you a merry New-year's-day, I shall conclude.

I am, honoured sir,

Your dutiful son,

ROBERT BURNS.

P. S. My meal is nearly out; but I am going to borrow, till I get more.

II.

TO MR. JOHN MURDOCH, SCHOOLMASTER,
Staples Inn Buildings, London.

Loehlee, 15th January, 1783.

DEAR SIR,

As I have an opportunity of sending you a letter, without putting you to that expense which any production of mine would but ill repay, I embrace it with pleasure, to tell you that I have not forgotten, nor ever will forget, the many obligations I lie under to your kindness and friendship.

I do not doubt, sir, but you will wish to know what has been the result of all the pains of an indulgent father, and a masterly teacher; and I wish I could gratify your curiosity with such a recital as you would be pleased with; but that is what I am afraid will not be the case. I have, indeed, kept

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III.

[The following is taken from the MS. Prose p
by our Bard to Mr. Riddel.]

ON rummaging over some old papers, I light
MS. of my early years, in which I had det
to write myself out, as I was placed by
among a class of men to whom my idea
have been nonsense. I had meant that th
should have lain by me, in the fond ho
some time or other, even after I was n
my thoughts would fall into the hands o
body capable of appreciating their value.
off thus:

Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poet
by R. B.—a man who had little art in
money, and still less in keeping it; but wa
ever, a man of some sense, a great deal of l
and unbounded good will to every creature,
and irrational. As he was but little inde
scholastic education, and bred at a plough-
performances must be strongly tinctured v
unpolished rustic way of life; but as I belie
are really his *own*, it may be some entert
to a curious observer of human nature, to
a ploughman thinks and feels, under the p
of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the lil
and passions, which, however diversified
modes and *manners* of life, operate prett
alike, I believe, on all the species.

“There are numbers in the world who
want sense to make a figure, so much as an

of their own abilities, to put them upon recording their observations, and allowing them the same importance which they do to those which appear in print," *Shenstone*.

"Pleasing, when youth has long expired, to trace
The forms our pencil, or our pen design'd!
Such was our youthful air, and shape, and face,
Such the soft image of our youthful mind," *Ibid*.

April, 1783.

Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and weakness it leads a young inexperienced mind into, still I think it in a great measure deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed on it. If any thing on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport, it is the feelings of green eighteen, in the company of the mistress of his heart, when she repays him with an equal return of affection,

August.

There is certainly some connexion between love, and music, and poetry; and therefore, I have always thought a fine touch of nature, that passage in a modern love-composition:

"As toward her cot he jogg'd along,
Her name was frequent in his song."

For my own part, I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet, till I got once heartily in love; and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart.

September.

I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher,

Mr. Smith, in his excellent *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom. Any ordinary pitch of fortitude may bear up tolerably well under those calamities, in the procurement of which we ourselves have had no hand; but when our own follies or crimes have made us miserable and wretched, to bear up with manly firmness, and at the same time have a proper penitential sense of our misconduct, is a glorious effort of self-command.

Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace,
 That press the soul, or wring the mind with anguish,
 Beyond comparison the worst are those
 That to our folly or our guilt we owe.
 In every other circumstance, the mind
 Has this to say — "It was no deed of mine;"
 But when to all the evil of misfortune
 This sting is added — "Blame thy foolish self!"
 Or worse far, the pangs of keen remorse;
 The torturing, gnawing consciousness of guilt —
 Of guilt, perhaps, where we've involved others;
 The young, the innocent, who fondly loved us —
 Nay, more, that very love their cause of ruin!
 O burning hell! in all thy store of torments,
 There's not a keener lash!
 Lives there a man so firm, who, while his heart
 Feels all the bitter horrors of his crime,
 Can reason down its agonizing throbs;
 And, after proper purpose of amendment,
 Can firmly force his jarring thoughts to peace?
 O, happy! happy! enviable man!
 O glorious magnanimity of soul!

March, 1784.

I have often observed, in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the

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worst, has something good about him; thou often nothing else than a happy temperate constitution inclining him to this or that. For this reason, no man can say in what any other person, besides himself, can be strict justice, called *wicked*. Let any of the same character for regularity of conduct among us inquire impartially how many vices he has been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance for want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstance intervening; how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped, because he was not in the line of such temptation; and, what is not always, weighs more than all the rest, how much he is indebted to the world's good opinion because the world does not know all—I see a man who can thus think, will scan the faults and crimes, of mankind around him with a brother's eye.

I have often courted the acquaintance of that part of mankind commonly known by the phrase of *blackguards*, sometimes farther than is consistent with the safety of my character who, by thoughtless prodigality or headstrong passions have been driven to ruin. Though distinguished by follies, nay sometimes "stained with * * * * *," I have yet found them, in not a few instances, some of the virtues, magnanimity, generosity, disinterestedness, and even modesty.

various sources of pleasure and enjoyment, which are, in a manner, *peculiar* to myself, or some here and there such other out-of-the-way person. Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of winter, more than the rest of the year. This I believe may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast; but there is something even in the

“Mighty tempest, and the hoary waste
Abrupt and deep, stretch'd o'er the buried earth,”—

which raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favourable to every thing great and noble. There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter-day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion: my mind is rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to *Him*, who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, “walks on the wings of the wind.” In one of these seasons, just after a train of misfortunes, I composed the following:

The wintry west extends his blast, &c.

See Poems.

Shenstone finely observes, that love-verses, writ without any real passion, are the most nauseous of all conceits; and I have often thought that no man can be a proper critic of love-composition, except he himself, in one or more instances, have been a warm votary of this passion. As I have been all along a miserable dupe to love, and have been led

into a thousand weaknesses and follies by it, for that reason I put the more confidence in my critical skill, in distinguishing foppery and conceit from real passion and nature. Whether the following song will stand the test, I will not pretend to say, because it is my own; only I can say it was, at the time, genuine from the heart.

Behind yon hills, &c.

See Songs.

I think the whole species of young men may be naturally enough divided into two grand classes, which I shall call the *grave* and the *merry*; though, by the bye, these terms do not with propriety enough express my ideas. The *grave* I shall cast into the usual division of those who are goaded on by the love of money, and those whose darling wish is to make a figure in the world. The *merry* are the men of pleasure of all denominations; the jovial lads, who have too much fire and spirit to have any settled rule of action; but, without much deliberation, follow the strong impulses of nature: the thoughtless, the careless, the indolent—in particular *he*, who, with a happy sweetness of natural temper, and a cheerful vacancy of thought, steals through life—generally, indeed, in poverty and obscurity; but poverty and obscurity are only evils to him who can sit gravely down and make a repining comparison between his own situation and that of others: and lastly, to grace the quorum, such as are, generally, those whose heads are capable of all the towerings of genius, and whose hearts are warmed with all the delicacy of feeling.

As the grand end of human life is to cultivate intercourse with that *Being* to whom we owe with every enjoyment that can render life delightful; and to maintain an integrative conduct to our fellow-creatures; that so, by forming piety and virtue into habit, we may be fit members for society of the pious and the good, which reason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave; do not see that the turn of mind and pursuits of a man of poverty and obscurity, are in the least inimical to the sacred interests of piety and virtue; than the, even lawful, bustling and straining after the world's riches and honours; and I do not doubt but that he may gain Heaven as well (which, by the bye, is no mean consideration), who, through the vale of life, amusing himself with the little flower that fortune throws in his way; who, straining straight forward, and perhaps spattering all about him, gains some of life's eminences; where, after all, he can only be seen a little more conspicuously, than when the pride of his heart, he is apt to term the indolent devil he has left behind him.

There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting grandness, in some of our ancient ballads, which seem to be the work of a masterly hand; and it often given me many a heart-ache to reflect, on such glorious old bards—bards who very profusely showed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love, with such strokes of nature—that their very names (O

mortifying to a bard's vanity!) are now "buried among the wreck of things which were."

O ye illustrious names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well; the last, the meanest of the muses' train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you—a poor rustic bard unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory! Some of you tell us, with all the charms of verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world—unfortunate in love: he too has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and, worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored. Like you, all his consolation was his muse: she taught him in rustic measures to complain. Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse! May the turf lie lightly on your bones! and may you now enjoy that solace and rest which this world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesy and love!

This is all worth quoting in my MSS. and more than all.

R. B.

IV.

TO MR. AIKEN.

Ayrshire, 1786.

SIR,

I WAS with Wilson, my printer, t'other day, and settled all our by-gone matters between us. After

or the printing, if I will advance for the paper
his you know is out of my power, so farewell
of a second edition till I grow richer! and
which, I think, will arrive at the payment
British national debt.

There is scarcely any thing hurts me so
being disappointed of my second edition,
having it in my power to show my gratitude
Mr. Ballantyne, by publishing my poem
Trigs of Ayr. I would detest myself as a
I thought I were capable, in a very long
forgetting the honest, warm, and tender d
with which he enters into my interests.
sometimes pleased with myself in my gratef
ations; but I believe, on the whole, I hav
little merit in it, as my gratitude is not a
the consequence of reflection, but sheerly
infective emotion of a heart too inattentive t
worldly maxims and views to settle into
bits.

I have been feeling all the various rotatio

know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society, or the vagaries of the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad; and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances every thing that can be laid in the scale against it.

* * * * *

You may perhaps think it an extravagant fancy, but it is a sentiment which strikes home to my very soul: though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet I think I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stunted bourn of our present existence; if so, then how should I, in the presence of that tremendous Being, the Author of existence, how should I meet the reproaches of those who stand to me in the dear relation of children, whom I deserted in the smiling innocency of helpless infancy? O thou great, unknown Power! thou Almighty God! who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left me nor forsaken me!

* * * * *

Since I wrote the foregoing sheet, I have seen nothing of the storm of mischief thickening over

... of my present resolution; but should the
umstances forbid me closing with your
r, or, enjoying it, only threaten to entail
misery —

* * * * *

To tell the truth, I have little reason for
nt, as the world, in general, has been kin
fully up to my deserts. I was, for some
; fast getting into the pining distrustful and
misanthrope. I saw myself alone, unfit for
ggle of life, shrinking at every rising cloud
chance-directed atmosphere of fortune, w
defenceless, I looked about in vain for a c
ever occurred to me, at least never with
e it deserved, that this world is a busy &
man a creature destined for a progre
ggle; and that, however I might posse
m heart and inoffensive manners (which las
bye, was rather more than I could well be
, more than these passive qualities, there

BURNS'S LETTERS.

chase of the butterfly from flower
hunt fancy from whim to whim.

* * * * *

You see, sir, that if to *know* one's e
probability of *mending* them, I stand a
but, according to the reverend Westmin
though conviction must precede convey
very far from always implying it.*

* * * * *

V.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

Ayrshire,

MADAM,

I AM truly sorry I was not at home yest
when I was so much honoured with your ord
my copies, and incomparably more by the
some compliments you are pleased to pay my
abilities. I am fully persuaded that there is n
class of mankind so feelingly alive to the titill
of applause, as the sons of Parnassus; nor is
to conceive how the heart of the poor bard
with rapture, when those, whose character
gives them a right to be polite judges, hono
with their approbation. Had you been thos
acquainted with me, Madam, you could no
touched my darling heart-chord more sweetl
by noticing my attempts to celebrate our illu
ancestor, the *Saviour of his Country*.

* This letter was evidently written under the dis
and occasioned by our Poet's separation from Mrs.

“ Great patriot-hero! ill-requited chief!”

The first book I met with in my early years, which I perused with pleasure, was *The Life of Hannibal*; the next was *The History of Sir William Wallace*: for several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious but unfortunate stories. In those boyish days I remember in particular being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur—

“ Syne to the Leglen wood, when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat.”

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half a dozen of miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto: and, as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged, I recollect (for even then I was a rhymer) that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits.

VI.

TO MRS. STEWART, OF STAIR.

1786.

MADAM,
THE hurry of my preparations for going abroad has hindered me from performing my promise so soon as I intended. I have here sent you a parcel of

songs, &c. which never made their appearance except to a friend or two at most. Perhaps some of them may be no great entertainment to you; but of that I am far from being an adequate judge. The song to the tune of *Ettrick Banks*, you will easily see the impropriety of exposing much, even in manuscript. I think myself it has some merit, both as a tolerable description of one of nature's sweetest scenes, a July evening, and one of the finest pieces of Nature's workmanship, the finest, indeed, we know any thing of, an amiable, beautiful young woman; * but I have no common friend to procure me that permission, without which I would not dare to spread the copy.

I am quite aware, Madam, what task the world would assign me in this letter. The obscure bard; when any of the great condescend to take notice of him, should heap the altar with the incense of flattery. Their high ancestry, their own great and godlike qualities and actions, should be recounted with the most exaggerated description. This, Madam, is a task for which I am altogether unfit. Besides a certain disqualifying pride of heart, I know nothing of your connexions in life, and have no access to where your real character is to be found—the company of your compeers: and more, I am afraid that even the most refined adulation is by no means the road to your good opinion.

One feature of your character I shall ever with grateful pleasure remember—the reception I got when I had the honour of waiting on you at Stair.

I am little acquainted with politeness ; but I know a good deal of benevolence of temper and goodness of heart. Surely, did those in exalted stations know how happy they could make some classes of their inferiors by condescension and affability, they would never stand so high, measuring out with every look the height of their elevation, but condescend as sweetly as did Mrs. Stewart of Stair.*

VII.

TO MISS * * *.

Mosgiel, 18th Nov. 1786.

MADAM,

POETS are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious whim, that I believe the world generally allows them a larger latitude in the laws of propriety, than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present you with. Whether it has poetical merit any way worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge ; but it is the best my abilities can produce ; and, what to a good heart will perhaps be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.

The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, Madam, you do not recollect it,

* The song enclosed is that beginning—

'Twas e'en — the dewy fields were green, &c.

See Songs.

as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *revoir* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my muse, on the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf.—It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed, who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you, your dearest comfort, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn twig that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene—and such the hour, when, in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the fairest pieces of Nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape, or met a poet's eye; those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce with aerial beings! Had Calumny and Villany taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain, dull, historic prose into metaphor and measure.

The enclosed song* was the work of my return home; and perhaps it but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene.

* * * * *

I have the honour to be, Madam,
Your most obedient,
and very humble servant,
ROBERT BURNS.

VIII.

In the name of the NINE. Amen.

WE, ROBERT BURNS, by virtue of a Warrant from NATURE, bearing date the Twenty-fifth day of January, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and fifty-nine, † POET-LAUREAT and BARD IN CHIEF in and over the Districts and Countries of KYLE, CUNNINGHAM, and CARRICK, of old extent, To our trusty and well-beloved WILLIAM CHALMERS and JOHN M'ADAM, Students and Practitioners in the ancient and mysterious Science of CONFOUNDING RIGHT and WRONG.

RIGHT TRUSTY,
BE it known unto you, That whereas, in the course of our care and watchings over the Order and Police of all and sundry the MANUFACTURERS, RETAINERS, and VENDERS OF POESY; Bards, Poets, Poetasters, Rhymers, Jingers, Songsters, Ballad-singers, &c. &c. &c. &c. male and female—We have disc

* 'Twas even—the dewy fields were green.

See Songs

† His birth-day.

BURNS'S LETTERS.

vered a certain * * *, nefarious, abominable, and wicked SONG, or BALLAD, a copy whereof We have here enclosed; OUR WILL THEREFORE IS, that You pitch upon and appoint the most execrable individual of that most execrable species, known by the appellation, phrase, and nickname, of THE DEIL'S YELL NOWTE;* and, after having caused him to kindle a fire at the CROSS OF AYR, ye shall, at noontide of the day, put into the said wretch's merciless hands the said copy of the said nefarious and wicked Song, to be consumed by fire in the presence of all beholders, in abhorrence of, and terrorem to all such COMPOSITIONS and COMPOSERS. And this in no wise leave ye undone, but have it executed in every point as this OUR MANDATE bears, before the twenty-fourth current; when IN PERSON We hope to applaud your faithfulness and zeal.

GIVEN AT MAUCHLINE, this twentieth day of November, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six.†

GOD SAVE THE BARD!

IX.

TO MR. CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, 27th Dec. 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,
I confess I have sinned the sin for which there is no pardon—ingratitude to friendship—hardly any forgiveness—in not writing you sooner; but of all men

* Old bachelors.

Enclosed was the ballad, probably Holy Willie's

Living, I had intended to send you an entertaining letter; and by all the plodding stupid powers that in nodding conceited majesty preside over the dull routine of business—a heavily solemn oath this! I am, and have been ever since I came to Edinburgh, as unfit to write a letter of humour as to write a commentary on the *Revelations*.

* * * * *

To make you some amends for what, before you reach this paragraph, you will have suffered, I enclose you two poems I have carded and spun since I passed Glenbuck. One blank in the address to Edinburgh, "Fair B****," is the heavenly Miss Burnet, daughter to Lord Monboddo, at whose house I have had the honour to be more than once. There has not been any thing nearly like her, in all the combinations of beauty, grace, and goodness, the great Creator has formed, since Milton's Eve on the first day of her existence.

I have sent you a parcel of subscription-bills; and have written to Mr. Ballantine and Mr. Aiken, to call on you for some of them, if they want them. My direction is—Care of Andrew Bruce, merchant, Bridge-street.

X.

TO THE EARL OF EGLINTON.

Edinburgh, January, 1787.

MY LORD,
As I have but slender pretensions to philosophy, I cannot rise to the exalted ideas of a citizen of the

world; but have all those national prejudices which I believe grow peculiarly strong in the breast of a Scotchman. There is scarcely any thing to which I am so feelingly alive, as the honour and welfare of my country; and, as a poet, I have no higher enjoyment than singing her sons and daughters. Fate had cast my station in the veriest shades of life; but never did a heart pant more ardently than mine, to be distinguished: though, till very lately, I looked in vain on every side for a ray of light. It is easy, then, to guess how much I was gratified with the countenance and approbation of one of my country's most illustrious sons, when Mr. Wauchope called on me yesterday on the part of your lordship. Your munificence, my lord, certainly deserves my very grateful acknowledgments; but your patronage is a bounty peculiarly suited to my feelings. I am not master enough of the etiquette of life to know whether there be not some impropriety in troubling your lordship with my thanks; but my heart whispered me to do it. From the emotions of my inmost soul I do it. Selfish ingratitude I hope I am incapable of; and mercenary servility I trust I shall ever have so much honest pride as to detest.

XI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 15th January, 1787.

MADAM,
YOURS of the 9th current, which I am this moment honoured with, is a deep reproach to me for un-

er, and I am one of "the sons of little men." To write him a mere matter-of-fact affair, like a servant's order, would be disgracing the little character I have; and to write the author of *The Vicinity and Manners* a letter of sentiment—I shudder every artery runs cold at the thought. I shall say, however, to write to him to-morrow or next day. His kind interposition in my behalf I have already experienced, as a gentleman waited on the other day, on the part of lord Eglinton, with ten guineas, by way of subscription for two copies of my next edition.

The word you object to in the mention I have made of my glorious countryman and your immortal ancestor, is indeed borrowed from Thomson, but it does not strike me as an improper epithet. I trusted my own judgment on your finding fault with it, and applied for the opinion of some of the literati here, who honour me with their criticisms, and they all allow it to be proper. The name you ask I cannot recollect, and I have no

You will see I have mentioned some others of the name. When I composed my *Vision* long ago, I had attempted a description of Koyle, of which the additional stanzas are a part, as it originally stood. My heart glows with a wish to be able to do justice to the merits of the *Saviour of his Country*, which, sooner or later, I shall at least attempt.

You are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet. Alas! madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserved some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head—I assure you, madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice, which has borne me to a height where I am absolutely, feelingly certain my abilities are inadequate to support me; and too surely do I see that time when the same tide will leave me, and recede, perhaps, as far below the mark of truth. I do not say this in the ridiculous affectation of self-abasement and modesty. I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy; and, however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion,

When proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes,

you will bear me witness, that, when my but
fame was at the highest, I stood, unintoxi-
cated with the inebriating cup in my hand, look-
ing forward with rueful resolve to the hastening
when the blow of Calumny should dash it to
ground, with all the eagerness of vengeful
triumph.

* * * * *

Your patronising me, and interesting yours
my fame and character as a poet, I rejoice in
it; and whether you can aid me in my subscription is a trifle. I
cannot aid me in my subscription is a trifle. I
paltry subscription-bill any charms to the hear-
ing of the immortal Wallace?

XII.

TO DR. MOORE.

judges of the first character. Your criticisms, sir, I receive with reverence; only, I am sorry they mostly came too late: a peccant passage or two, that I would certainly have altered, were gone to the press.

The hope to be admired for ages is, in by far the greater part of those even who are authors of repute, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities; and as few, if any writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and manners in a different phasis from what is common, which may assist originality of thought. Still I know very well the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately had; and in a language where Pope and Churchill have raised the laugh, and Shienstone and Gray drawn the tear—where Thomson and Beattie have painted the landscape, and Lyttelton and Collins described the heart, I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.

XIII.

TO THE REVEREND G. LOWRIE, OF NEWMILLS,

Near Kilmarnock.

Edinburgh, 5th February, 1787.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

WHEN I look at the date of your kind letter, my heart reproaches me severely with ingratitude in neglecting so long to answer it. I will not trouble you with any account, by way of apology, of my hurried life and distracted attention: do me the justice to believe that my delay by no means proceeded from want of respect. I feel, and ever shall feel, for you, the mingled sentiments of esteem for a friend, and reverence for a father.

I thank you, sir, with all my soul, for your friendly hints; though I do not need them so much as my friends are apt to imagine. You are dazzled with newspaper-accounts and distant reports; but in reality, I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of prosperity. Novelty may attract the attention of mankind a while; to it I owe my present eclat; but I see the time not far distant, when the popular tide, which has borne me to a height of which I am, perhaps, unworthy, shall recede with silent celerity, and leave me a barren waste of sand, to descend at my leisure to my forlorn station. I do not say this in the affectation of modesty; I see the consequence is unavoidable, I am prepared for it. I had been at a good deal of pains to form a just, impartial estimate of my

tellectual powers before I came here ; I have not added, since I came to Edinburgh, any thing to the account ; and I trust I shall take every atom of it back to my shades, the covert^s of my unnoticed, early years.

In Dr. Blacklock, whom I see very often, I have found, what I would have expected in our friend, a clear head and an excellent heart.

By far the most agreeable hours I spend in Edinburgh must be placed to the account of Miss Lowrie and her piano fort^é. I cannot help repeating to you and Mrs. Lowrie a compliment that Mr. Mackenzie, the celebrated "Man of Feeling," paid to Miss Lowrie, the other night, at the concert. I had come in at the interlude, and sat down by him, till I saw Miss Lowrie in a seat not very distant, and went up to pay my respects to her. On my return to Mr. Mackenzie, he asked me who she was ; I told him 'twas the daughter of a reverend friend of mine in the west country. He returned, there was something very striking, to his idea, in her appearance. On my desiring to know what it was, he was pleased to say, "She has a great deal of the elegance of a well-bred lady about her, with all the sweet simplicity of a country-girl."

My compliments to all the happy inmates of Saint Margaret's.

I am, dear sir,

Yours most gratefully,

ROBERT BURNS.

SIR,

PARDON my seeming neglect in delaying so to acknowledge the honour you have done me, and notice of me, January 23d. Not many years ago I knew no other employment than the plough, nor could boast any thing higher than a distant acquaintance with a country-cleaver. Mere greatness never embarrasses me; I like nothing to ask from the great, and I do not feel myself unworthy of their judgment: but genius, polished by learning, and raised to its proper point of elevation in the eyes of the world, this of late I frequently meet with, and I shudder at its approach. I scorn the affectation of assuming a false modesty to cover self-conceit. That I have some merit I do not deny; but I see, with indignation and wringings of heart, that the novelty of my name, and the honest national prejudice of my countrymen, have borne me to a height altogether above and unenable to my abilities.

For the honour Miss W. has done me, please to return her, in my name, my most grateful acknowledgments, which I have more than once thought of expressing to her.

are, I think, two characteristic features in her poetry—the unfettered wild flight of native genius, and the querulous, *sombre* tenderness of time-settled sorrow.

I only know what pleases me, often without being able to tell why.

XV.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

Edinburgh, 1787.

MY LORD,

I WANTED to purchase a profile of your lordship, which I was told was to be got in town: but I am truly sorry to see that a blundering painter has spoiled a “human face divine.” The enclosed stanzas I intended to have written below a picture or profile of your lordship; could I have been so happy as to procure one with any thing of a likeness.

As I will soon return to my shades, I wanted to have something like a material object for my gratitude; I wanted to have it in my power to say to a friend, There is my noble patron, my generous benefactor. Allow me, my lord, to publish these verses. I conjure your lordship, by the honest throes of gratitude, by the generous wish of benevolence, by all the powers and feelings which compose the magnanimous mind, do not deny me this petition.* I owe much to your lordship; and what has not in some other instances always been the case

* It does not appear that the Earl granted this request, nor have the verses alluded to been found among the MSS.

manner of supporting that character, are nat-
ing to my pride ; and I would be jealous of the
ity of my grateful attachment where I was under
patronage of one of the much favoured sons of
une.

Almost every poet has celebrated his patrons,
ticularly when they were names dear to fame,
illustrious in their country ; allow me, then, my
f, if you think the verses have intrinsic merit, to
the world how much I have the honour to be

Your lordship's highly indebted,
and ever grateful humble servant.

XVI.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

MY LORD,

E honour your lordship has done me, by your
ke and advice in yours of the 1st instant, I shall
r gratefully remember :

contended fields, where Caledonia, rejoicing, her bloody lion borne through broken ranks to glory and fame; and, catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless names in song. But, my lord, in the midst of these enthusiastic reveries, a long-visaged, dry, moral-looking phantom strides across my imagination, and pronounces these emphatic words:

“ I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence. Friend, I do not come to open the ill-closed wounds of your follies and misfortunes, merely to give you pain: I wish through these wounds to imprint a lasting lesson on your heart. I will not mention how many of my salutary advices you have despised: I have given you line upon line, and precept upon precept; and while I was chalking out to you the straight way to wealth and character, with audacious effrontery you have zig-zagged across the path, contemning me to my face: you know the consequences. It is not yet three months since home was so hot for you, that you were on the wing for the western shore of the Atlantic, not to make a fortune, but to hide your misfortune.

“ Now that your dear-loved Scotia puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these Will-o'-Wisp meteors of fancy and whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin? I grant that the utmost ground you can occupy is but half a step from the veriest poverty; but still it is half a step from it. If all that I can urge be ineffectual, let her who seldom calls to you in vain, let the call of pride prevail with you. You know how you feel at the iron gripe of ruthless oppression: you know how you bear the galling sneer of contumelious greatness. I hold you out

the conveniences, the comforts of life, independence and character, on the one hand: I tender you servility, dependence, and wretchedness, on the other. I will not insult your understanding by bidding you make a choice.”*

This, my lord, is unanswerable. I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic muse in my wonted way at the plough-tail. Still, my lord, while the drops of life warm my heart, gratitude to that dear-loved country in which I boast my birth, and gratitude to those her distinguished sons, who have honoured me so much with their patronage and approbation, shall, while stealing through my humble shades, ever distend my bosom, and at times, as now, draw forth the swelling tear.

XVII.

TO THE HONOURABLE BAILIES OF CANONGATE,
EDINBURGH.

GENTLEMEN,

I AM sorry to be told, that the remains of Robert Fergusson, the so justly celebrated poet, a man whose talents, for ages to come, will do honour to our Caledonian name, lie in your church-yard, among the ignoble dead, unnoticed and unknown.

Some memorial to direct the steps of the lovers of Scottish Song, when they wish to shed a tear over the “ narrow house” of the bard who is no more, is surely a tribute due to Fergusson’s memory; a tribute I wish to have the honour of paying.

* Copied from the Bee, vol. ii. p. 319, and compared with the Author’s MSS.

I petition you, then, Gentlemen, to permit me to lay a simple stone over his revered ashes, to remain an unalienable property to his deathless fame. I have the honour to be, Gentlemen, your very humble servant, (*sic subscribitur*).

ROBERT BURNS.

XVIII.

TO * * * * *

MY DEAR SIR,

You may think, and too justly, that I am a selfish ungrateful fellow, having received so many repeated instances of kindness from you, and yet never putting pen to paper to say—thank you; but if you knew what a devil of a life my conscience has led me on that account, your good heart would think yourself too much avenged. By the bye, there is nothing in the whole frame of man which seems to me so unaccountable as that thing called conscience. Had the troublesome yelping cur powers efficient to prevent a mischief, he might be of use: but, at the beginning of the business, his feeble efforts are to the workings of passion as the infant frosts of an autumnal morning to the unclouded fervour of the rising sun: and no sooner are the tumultuous doings of the wicked deed over, than, amidst the bitter native consequences of folly, in the very vortex of our horrors, up starts conscience, and harrows us with the feelings of the d*****.

I have enclosed you, by way of expiation, some verse and prose, that, if they merit a place in your

HERE LIES ROBERT FERGUSSON, POET.

born, September 5th, 1751—Died, 16th October, 1774.

No sculptured marble here, nor pompous lay,

“ No storied urn nor animated bust ;”

This simple stone directs pale Scotia's way

To pour her sorrows o'er her poet's dust.

On the other side of the Stone is as follows :

“ By special grant of the Managers to Robert Burns, who erected this stone, this burial-place is to remain for ever sacred to the memory of Robert Burns.”

XIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, March 22, 1787.

MADAM,

READ your letter with watery eyes. A little, very
little while ago, I had scarce a friend but the stub-

necessar'yt o claim the privileg^e of thinking for myself. The noble earl of Glencairn, to whom I owe more than to any man, does me the honour of giving me his strictures; his hints, with respect to impropriety or indelicacy, I follow implicitly.

You kindly interest yourself in my future views and prospects: there I can give you no light;—it is all

“ Dark as was chaos, ere the infant sun
Was roll'd together, or had tried his beams
Athwart the gloom profound.”

The appellation of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride: to continue to deserve it, is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it my power, unplagued with the routine of business, for which, heaven knows! I am unfit enough, to make leisurly pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honoured abodes of her heroes.

But these are all Utopian thoughts: I have dallied long enough with life: 'tis time to be in earnest. I have a fond, an aged mother to care for: and some other bosom-ties perhaps equally tender.

Where the individual only suffers by the consequences of his own thoughtlessness, indolence, or folly, he may be excusable: nay, shining abilities, and some of the nobler virtues, may half-sanctify a heedless character: but where God and nature have entrusted the welfare of others to his care; where the trust is sacred and the ties are dear, that

intend, so far as I may be said to have any intention, to return to my old acquaintance, the plough; and, if I can meet with a lease by which I can live, commence farmer. I do not intend to give up poetry: being bred to labour secures me independence; and the muses are my chief, sometimes have even my only enjoyment. If my practice second my resolution, I shall have principally at heart the serious business of life: but, while following my plough, or building up my shocks, I shall cast a leisure glance to that dear, that only feature of my character, which gave me the notice of my country, and the patronage of a Wallace.

Thus, honoured Madam; I have given you the story, his situation, and his views, native as they are to his own bosom.

* * * * *

XX.

EXTRACTS FROM HIS COMMON PLACE BOOK.

with a cart-load of recollection.' I don't know how it is with the world in general, but with me, making my remarks is by no means a solitary pleasure. I want some one to laugh with me, some one to be grave with me, some one to please me and help my discrimination, with his or her own remark, and at times, no doubt, to admire my acuteness and penetration. The world are so busied with selfish pursuits, ambition, vanity, interest, or pleasure, that very few think it worth their while to make any observation on what passes around them, except where that observation is a sucker, or branch of the darling plant they are rearing in their fancy. I am I sure, notwithstanding all the sentimental rights of novel-writers, and the sage philosophy of moralists, whether we are capable of so intimate and cordial a coalition of friendship, as that one man may pour out his bosom, his every thought and beating fancy, his very inmost soul, with unreserved confidence to another, without hazard of losing part of that respect which man deserves from man; or, in the unavoidable imperfections attending human nature, of one day repenting his confidence. For these reasons I am determined to make these pages my confidant. I will sketch every character in any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insert anecdotes, I take down remarks, in the old law phrase, *without feud or favour*.—Where I hit on any thing new, my own applause will, in some measure, atone for my vanity; and, begging Patroclus' and Achates' pardon, I think a lock and key a security, at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever. My own private story likewise, my love-adven-

such friendship, since con-
ket, or honesty was set up to sale.
to these seemingly invidious, but too just ideas
human friendship, I would cheerfully make one
ception—the connexion between two persons of
ferent sexes, when their interests are united and
sorbed by the tie of love—

When thought meets thought, ere from the lips it part,
And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart.

Here confidence, confidence that exalts them the
more in one another's opinion, that endears them
the more to each other's hearts, unreservedly
"reigns and revels." But this is not my lot; and,
in my situation, if I am wise (which by the bye I
have no great chance of being), my fate should be
cast with the Psalmist's sparrow, "to watch alone
on the house-tops." — Oh the pity!

* * * * *

There are few of the sore evils under the sun
give me more uneasiness and chagrin than the com-
parison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth
with the reception which

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gives the bard, or whatever he is, good wishes, beyond, perhaps, any yet how will it mortify him to see a abilities would scarcely have made a *tailor*, and whose heart is not wor things, meet with attention and not withheld from the son of genius and po

The noble Glencairn has wounded m here, because I dearly esteem, respect him. He showed so much attention, attention, one day, to the only blockh (the whole company consisted of his lon derpate, and myself), that I was within l of throwing down my gage of contemp ance; but he shook my hand, and looked volently good at parting. God bless him! should never see him more, I shall love my dying day! I am pleased to think I e pable of the throes of gratitude, as I am i deficient in some other virtues.

With Dr. Blair I am more at my ease. respect him with humble veneration; but kindly interests himself in my welfare, or s when he descends from his pinnacle, and i on equal ground in conversation, my heart c with what is called *liking*. When he neq for the mere carcass of greatness, or whe measures the difference of our points of c I say to myself, with scarcely any emotion, I care for him, or his pomp either?

* * * * *

It is not easy forming an exact judgmen one; but, in my opinion, Dr. Blair is n astonishing proof what industry and applic

very first, rank in prose; even in prose
Nature's making can only take the *pas* of him.
has a heart, not of the very finest water, but far
a being an ordinary one. In short, he is truly a
rthy, and most respectable character.

XXI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 15th April, 1787.

MADAM,
HERE is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike.
The periods of Johnson and the pauses of Sterne
may hide a selfish heart. For my part, Madam, I
must I have too much pride for servility, and too
little prudence for selfishness. I have this moment
opened open your letter, but

“ Rude am I in speech,
And therefore little can I grace my cause
In speaking for myself —”

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uly:

BURN

dium of Commissione
that we can settle wh
ing on you.

Dr. Smith* was jus
before I received you:

TO

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I RECEIVED the boo
tioned to Mrs. Dunl
the coverts of imag
tude. I thank you
done me; and to my
ber it. To be high
what I have in co
regard these volu
friendly esteem, is
tion.

ce this tangent
re returned to my wonted leisurely
d circle, I may probably endeavour to return her
etic compliment in kind.

XXIII.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 30th April, 1787.

—YOUR criticisms, madam, I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. You are right in your guess that I am not very amenable to counsel. Poets, much my superiors, have so flattered those who possessed the adventitious qualities of wealth and power, that I am determined to flatter no created being either in prose or verse.

I set as little by princes, lords, clergy, critics, & all these respective gentry do by my bardship. respect from the world by

four weeks, or less, to have the honour of appearing at Dunlop, in its defence, in person.

XXIV.

TO THE REVEREND DR. HUGH BLAIR.

Lawn-Market, Edinburgh, 3d May, 1787.

REVEREND AND MUCH-RESPECTED SIR,

I LEAVE Edinburgh to-morrow morning, but could not go without troubling you with half a line, sincerely to thank you for the kindness, patronage, and friendship you have shown me. I often felt the embarrassment of my singular situation; drawn forth from the veriest shades of life to the glare of remark; and honoured by the notice of those illustrious names of my country, whose works, while they are applauded to the end of time, will ever instruct and mend the heart. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, and honour me with the acquaintance of the permanent lights of genius and literature, those who are truly benefactors of the immortal nature of man; I knew very well, that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character when once the novelty was over. I have made up my mind, that abuse, or almost even neglect, will not surprise me in my quarters.

I have sent you a proof impression, of Beugo's work for me, done on Indian paper, as a trifling but sincere testimony with what heart-warm gratitude I am, &c.



ON our return, at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, danced till the ladies left us, at three in the morning. Our dancing was none of the French or English staid and formal movements; the ladies sung Scotch songs like angels, at intervals; then we flew at it *à la bowster, Tullochgorum, Loch Erroch side,* * like midges sporting in the mottie sun, or crochets prognosticating a storm in a hairst day.—When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till a good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Ben Nevis. We all kneeled; our worthy landlord's hand held the bowl; each man a full glass in his hand, and I, as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies I suppose, after a small refreshment of the gifts of Sam-

My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gayly mounted, fell sadly astern; but my old mare, Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she strained past the Highlandman in spite of all his efforts, with the hair-halter: just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse, as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breeches a—e in a clipt hedge; and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship between her and the Highlandman's horse. Jenny Geddes trode over me with such cautious reverence, that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected; so I came off with a few cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future.

I have yet fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, raking, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon. I was going to say, a wife too; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of the house of Parnassus, and like other younger sons of great families, I may intrigue, if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry.

I am afraid I have almost ruined one source, the principal one indeed, of my former happiness; that eternal propensity I always had to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish rapture. I have no paradisiacal evening interviews stolen from

the restless cares and prying inhabitants of this weary world. I have only * * *. This last is one of your distant acquaintances, has a fine figure, and elegant manners; and in the train of some great folks whom you know, has seen the politest quarters in Europe. I do like her a good deal; but what piques me is her conduct at the commencement of our acquaintance. I frequently visited her when I was in * * *, and after passing regularly the intermediate degrees between the distant formal bow and the familiar grasp round the waist, I ventured in my careless way to talk of friendship in rather ambiguous terms; and after her return to * * *, I wrote to her in the same style. Miss, construing my words farther I suppose than even I intended, flew off in a tangent of female dignity and reserve, like a mountain-lark in an April morning; and wrote me an answer which measured me out very completely what an immense way I had to travel before I could reach the climate of her favour. But I am an old hawk at the sport; and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply, as brought my bird from her aerial towerings, pop down at my foot like corporal Trim's hat.

As for the rest of my acts, and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes; they shall be recorded in a few weeks hence at Linnithgow, in the chronicles of your memory, by

ROBERT BURNS.

XXVI.

TO DR. MOORE.

Mauchline, 2d August, 1787.

SIR,

FOR some months past I have been rambling over the country; but I am now confined with some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of *ennui*, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself. My name has made some little noise in this country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment. I will give you an honest narrative; though I know it will be often at my own expense;—for I assure you, sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, excepting in the trifling affair of *wisdom*, I sometimes think I resemble,—I have, I say, like him, *turned my eyes to behold madness and folly*, and, like him, too frequently shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship. * * * After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you, that the poor author wrote them under some twitching qualms of conscience, arising from suspicion that he was doing what he ought not to do: a predicament he has more than once been in before.

I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pye-coated guardians of

“ My ancient but ignoble blood
“ Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood.”

ules, Purple, Argent, &c. quite disowned me.

My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes into the world at large; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom.— I have met with few who understood *men, their manners, and their ways*, equal to him; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headstrong ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances; consequently, I was born a very poor man's son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a gentleman's house: but it was his dearest wish and prayer

my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot * piety. I say *idiot* piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraps, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look out in suspicious places: and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's, beginning, *How are thy servants blest, O Lord!* I particularly remember one half-stanza, which was music to my boyish ear—

“ For though on dreadful whirls we hung
“ High on the broken wave.—”

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection*, one of my school-books. The two first books I ever read in private, and which gave me more

* Idiot *for* idiotic.

Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my v
which will boil along there till the flood-gat
life shut in eternal rest.

Polemical divinity about this time was pu
the country half-mad ; and I, ambitious of sh
in conversation parties on Sundays, between
mons, at funerals, &c., used, a few years afterw
to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and i
cretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy ag
me, which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to
My social disposition, when not checked by
modifications of spirited pride, was, like our
chism-definition of infinitude, *without bounds*
mits. I formed several connexions with other
kers who possessed superior advantages, the g
ling actors, who were busy in the rehearsal o
in which they were shortly to appear on the s
life, where, alas ! I was destined to drudge
the scenes. It is not commonly at this gre
that our young gentry have a just sense of t

ance of my plough-boy carcass, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books ; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations ; and one, whose heart I am sure not even the *Munny Begum* scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction ; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died ; the farm proved a ruinous bargain ; and, to clenck the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my *Tale of Two Dogs*. My father was advanced in life when he married ; I was the eldest of seven children : and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more ; and, to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly : I was a dexterous ploughman, for my age ; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert) who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I ; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the s——l factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave, brought me to my sixteenth year ; a little before

which period I first committed the sin of Rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language; but you know the Scottish idiom—she was a *bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass*. In short, she altogether, unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion, I cannot tell: you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c.; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel, to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song, which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love! and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well

as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moor-lands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

Thus with me began love and poetry; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands at the commencement of his lease; otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here; but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away, to *where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.*

It is during the time that we lived on this farm that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish—no *solitaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from *Salmon's* and *Guthrie's* geographical grammars; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the *Spectator*. These, with *Pope's Works*, some plays of *Shakspeare*, *Tull and Dickson on Agriculture*, *The Pantheon*, *Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding*, *Stackhouse's History of the Bible*, *Justice's British Gardener's Di-*

ed over them driving my cart, or walking to
r, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noti
true tender, or sublime, from affectation a
tian. I am convinced I owe to this practi
ch of my critic craft, such as it is.

in my seventeenth year, to give my manners
ish, I went to a country dancing school.— My
r had an unaccountable antipathy against the
etings; and my going was, what to this mome
spent, in opposition to his wishes. My father,
aid before, was subject to strong passions; fro
at instance of disobedience in me he took a
dislike to me, which I believe was one cause
: dissipation which marked my succeeding yea
ay dissipation, comparatively with the strictne
l sobriety, and regularity of presbyterian cou
life; for though the Will o' Wisp meteors
oughtless whim were almost the sole lights
path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue k
for several years afterwards within the line
ocence. The great misfortune of my life was

squeeze myself into it;—the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity, as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly to solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that, always where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain*. My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and as in every other warfare in this world my fortune was various, sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reep-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love-adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity, that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe.—The very goose fea-

arm-house and cottage; but the grave
ice, ambition, or avarice, baptize these things by
name of Follies. To the sons and daughters of
war and poverty, they are matters of the most se-
ns nature; to them the ardent hope, the stolen
review, the tender farewell, are the greatest and
st delicious parts of their enjoyments.

Another circumstance in my life which made
me alteration in my mind and manners, was, that
spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling
east, a good distance from home, at a noted school,
learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in
hich I made a pretty good progress. But I made
greater progress in the knowledge of mankind.
he contraband trade was at that time very success-
il, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in
ith those who carried it on. Scenes of swagger-
g riot and roaring dissipation were till this time
ew to me; but I was no enemy to social life.
ere, though I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix
in a drunken squabble, yet I went of

arden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel,

“ Like Proserpine, gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower——”

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I stayed, I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in this country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.

I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works; I had seen human nature in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly; I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me; and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents, flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three farthings' worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of day-book and ledger.

My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l' amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; *Sterne* and *M'Kenzie*—*Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling*—were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my

mind ; but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand ; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme ; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet ! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except *Winter, a Dirge*, the eldest of my printed pieces ; *the Death of Poor Maillie, John Barleycorn*, and songs, first, second, and third.* Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

My twenty-third year was to me an important æra. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town (Irwin) to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair. My * * * ; and, to finish the whole, as we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire, and burnt to ashes ; and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

I was obliged to give up this scheme : the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head ; and, what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption ; and, to crown my distresses, a *belle fille* whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up

* " It was upon a Lammas night," &c.

" Now westlin winds, and slaught'ring guns," &c.

" Behind yon hills where Lugar flows," &c.

rear of this infernal file, was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—*Depart from me, ye accursed!*

From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea; where, after a variety of good and ill fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him, he had been set on shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of every thing. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding, that he is at this time master of a large West-Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself, where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief;

Fathom, which gave me some idea of the
Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are
print, I had given up; but meeting with *Fergusso*
Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sound
lyre with emulating vigour. When my father di
his all went among the hell-hounds that prowl
the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to c
lect a little money in the family amongst us, w
which, to keep us together, my brother and I to
a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my ha
brained imagination, as well as my social and an
rous madness; but, in good sense, and every so
qualification, he was far my superior.

I entered on this farm with a full resoluti
Come, go to, I will be wise! I read farming boo
I calculated crops; I attended markets; and,
short, in spite of *the devil, and the world, and*
flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man;
the first year, from unfortunately buying bad
the second, from a late harvest, we lost half
crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I retur
to his vomit and the sun that

I had a notion myself, that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. *Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against prophane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, *The Lament*. This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of Rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; in truth it was only nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But, before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power: I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver;—or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their fa-

your. It ever was my opinion, that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves.— To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but, at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West-Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty.— My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde; for

“ Hungry ruin had me in the wind.”

I had been for some days sculking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should

ever measure in Caledonia. *The gloomy night is gathering fast,** when a letter from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of mine overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics, for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the earl of Glencairn. Oublie moi, Grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!

I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to *catch* the characters and *the manners living as they rise*. Whether I have profited, time will show.

* * * * *

My most respectful compliments to Miss W. Her very elegant and friendly letter I cannot answer at present, as my presence is requisite in Edinburgh, and I set out to-morrow.

In the original letter to Dr. Moore, our poet described his ancestors as “renting lands of the noble Keiths of Marischal, and as having had the honour

* See *Songs*.

Club-law, where the right is ~~always~~ ~~with~~ ~~us~~ strongest. But those who dare welcome ruin, and shake hands with infamy, for what they sincerely believe to be the cause of their God or their king are, as Mark Antony says in Shakspeare of Brutus and Cassius, *honourable men*. I mention this circumstance, because it threw my father on the world at large."

XXVII.

TO MR. WALKER, BLAIR OF ATHOL.

Inverness, 5th Sept. 1787

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just time to write the foregoing,* and I tell you that it was (at least most part of it) the effusion of a half-hour I spent at Bruar. I do not mean it was extempore, for I have endeavoured to brush it up as well as Mr. N * * * 's chat, and the jogging of the chaise would allow. It eases a good deal, as rhyme is the coin with whi

The "little angel band!" I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyars. I shall never forget the fine family-piece I saw at Blair; the amiable, the truly noble duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the head of the table: the lovely "olive plants," as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother; the beautiful Mrs. G * * * ; the lovely, sweet Miss C * * * , &c. I wish I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My lord duke's kind hospitality — markedly kind indeed! Mr. G * * * of F * * * 's charms of conversation. Sir W. M * * * 's friendship. In short, the recollection of all that polite agreeable company raises an honest glow in my bosom.

XXVIII.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

Edinburgh, 17th Sept. 1787.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I ARRIVED here safe yesterday evening, after a tour of twenty-two days, and travelling near six hundred miles, windings included. My farthest stretch was about ten miles beyond Inverness. I went through the heart of the Highlands, by Crieff, Taymouth, the famous seat of lord Breadalbane, down the Tay, among cascades and Druidical circles of stones, to Dunkeld, a seat of the duke of Athol; thence cross Tay, and up one of his tributary streams to Blair of Athol, another of the duke's seats, where I had the honour of spending nearly two days with

his grace and family; thence many miles through a wild country, among cliffs gray with eternal snows, and gloomy savage glens, till I crossed Spey, and went down the stream through Strathspey, so famous in Scottish music, Badenoch, &c., till I reached Grant castle, where I spent half a day with sir James Grant and family; and then crossed the country for Fort George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth; there I saw the identical bed in which, tradition says, king Duncan was murdered: lastly, from Fort George to Inverness.

I returned by the coast, through Nairn, Forres, and so on, to Aberdeen; thence to Stonehive, where James Burness, from Montrose, met me by appointment. I spent two days among our relations, and found our aunts, Jean and Isabel, still alive, and hale old women. John Caird, though born the same year with our father, walks as vigorously as I can; they have had several letters from his son in New York. William Brand is likewise a stont old fellow: but further particulars I delay till I see you, which will be in two or three weeks. The rest of my stages are not worth rehearsing: warm as I was from Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing towns or fertile carses? I slept at the famous Brodie of Brodie's one night, and dined at Gordon castle next day with the duke, duchess, and family. I am thinking to cause my old mare to meet me, by means of John Ronald, at Glasgow: but you shall hear further from me before I leave Edinburgh. My love and many compliments from the north, to you and her, and my brotherly compliments to the

have been trying for a birth for William, but am not likely to be successful. Farewell!

XXIX.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

MY LORD,

I KNOW your lordship will disapprove of my ideas in a request I am going to make to you, but I have weighed, long and seriously weighed, my situation, my hopes, and turn of mind, and am fully fixed to my scheme, if I can possibly effectuate it. I wish to get into the excise; I am told that your lordship's interest will easily procure me the grant from the commissioners; and your lordship's patronage and goodness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of *home* that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three sisters, from destruction. There, my lord, you have bound me over to the highest gratitude.

My brother's farm is but a wretched lease; but I think he will probably weather out the remaining seven years of it; and, after the assistance which I have given, and will give him, to keep the family together, I think, by my guess, I shall have rather better than two hundred pounds, and instead of seeking what is almost impossible at present to find, a farm that I can certainly live by, with so small a stock, I shall lodge this sum in a banking-house, a sacred deposit, excepting only the calls of uncommon distress or necessitous old age; * * * * *

length of my hopes; nor have I yet appeared to any body else. Indeed my heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of the great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am unwilling to dog the heels of greatness with the pertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise, as the cold denial: but to your lordship I have not only the honour, the comfort, but the pleasure of being

Your lordship's much obliged,
And deeply indebted humble servant.

XXX.

TO ——— DALRYMPLE, ESQ. OF ORANGEFIELD.

Edinburgh, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

The devil is so elated with his success

memory, when they sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and spake not a word.

* * * * *

I am naturally of a superstitious cast, and as soon as my wonder-scared imagination regained its consciousness, and resumed its functions, I cast about what this mania of yours might portend. My foreboding ideas had the wide stretch of possibility; and several events, great in their magnitude, and important in their consequences, occurred to my fancy. The downfall of the conclave, or the crushing of the cork rumps; a ducal coronet to lord George G * * *, and the Protestant interest, or St. Peter's keys, to * * * *.

You want to know how I come on. I am just in statu quo, or, not to insult a gentleman with my Latin, in "auld use and wont." The noble earl of Glencairn took me by the hand to-day, and interested himself in my concerns, with a goodness like that benevolent Being whose image he so richly bears. He is a stronger proof of the immortality of the soul than any that philosophy ever produced. A mind like his can never die. Let the worshipful 'squire H. L. or the reverend Mass J. M. go into their primitive nothing. At best they are but ill-digested lumps of chaos, only one of them strongly tinged with bituminous particles and sulphureous effluvia. But my noble patron, eternal as the heroic swell of magnanimity, and the generous throb of benevolence, shall look on with princely eye at "the war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds."

XXXI.

TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD.

December, 1787.

SIR,

MR. M'Kenzie, in Mauchline, my very warm and worthy friend, has informed me how much you are pleased to interest yourself in my fate as a man, and (what to me is incomparably dearer) my fame as a poet. I have, sir, in one or two instances, been patronized by those of your character in life, when I was introduced to their notice by * * * * friends to them, and honoured acquaintance to me; but you are the first gentleman in the country whose benevolence and goodness of heart has interested him for me, unsolicited and unknown. I am not master enough of the etiquette of these matters to know, nor did I stay to inquire, whether formal duty bade, or cold propriety disallowed, my thanking you in this manner, as I am convinced, from the light in which you kindly view me, that you will do me the justice to believe this letter is not the manœuvre of the needy, sharpening author, fastening on those in upper life who honour him with a little notice of him or his works. Indeed, the situation of poets is generally such, to a proverb, as may, in some measure, palliate that prostitution of heart and talents they have at times been guilty of. I do not think prodigality is, by any means, a necessary concomitant of a poetic turn; but I believe a careless, indolent inattention to economy, is almost inseparable from it: then there must be,

the heart of every bard of Nature's making, a certain modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, that will ever keep him out of the way of those windfalls of fortune, which frequently light on hardy impudence and foot-licking servility. It is not easy to imagine a more helpless state than his, whose poetic fancy unfits him for the world, and whose character as a scholar gives him some pretensions to the *politesse* of life—yet is as poor as I am.

For my part, I thank Heaven my star has been kinder; learning never elevated my ideas above the peasant's shed, and I have an independent fortune at the plough-tail.

I was surprised to hear that any one who pretended in the least to the *manners of the gentleman*, should be so foolish, or worse, as to stoop to traduce the morals of such a one as I am; and so inhumanly cruel, too, as to meddle with that late most unfortunate, unhappy part of my story. With a tear of gratitude I thank you, sir, for the warmth with which you interposed in behalf of my conduct. I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion—but reverence to God, and integrity to my fellow-creatures, I hope I shall ever preserve. I have no return, sir, to make you for your goodness, but one—a return which, I am persuaded, will not be unacceptable—the honest warm wishes of a grateful heart for your happiness, and every one of that lovely flock who stand to you in a filial relation. If ever Calumny aim the poisoned shaft at *them* may Friendship be by to ward the blow!

XXXII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 21st Jan. 1788.

AFTER six weeks' confinement, I am beginning to walk across the room. They have been six horrible weeks, anguish and low spirits made me unfit to read, write, or think.

I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer resigns a commission: for I would not *take in* any poor ignorant wretch, by *selling out*. Lately I was a sixpenny private, and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough; now I march to the campaign, a starving cadet; a little more conspicuously wretched.

I am ashamed of all this; for though I do want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.

As soon as I can bear the journey, which will be, I suppose, about the middle of next week, I leave Edinburgh, and soon after I shall pay my grateful duty at Dunlop-house.

XXXIII.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER TO THE SAME.

Edinburgh, 12th Feb. 1788.

SOME things in your late letters hurt me: not that *you say them*, but that *you mistake me*. Religion, my honoured Madam, has not only been all my life my chief dependence, but my dearest enjoyment. I have indeed been the luckless victim of wayward follies: but, alas! I have ever been "more fool than knave." A mathematician without religion is a probable character; an irreligious poet is a monster.

* * * * *

XXXIV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mossgiel, 7th March, 1788.

MADAM,

THE last paragraph in yours of the 30th February affected me most, so I shall begin my answer where you ended your letter. That I am often a sinner with any little wit I have, I do confess; but I have taxed my recollection to no purpose to find out when it was employed against you. I hate an ungenerous sarcasm a great deal worse than I do the devil; at least, as Milton describes him; and though I may be rascally enough to be sometimes

your wit, because you may depend on
sense; or if you choose to be silent, you know you
can rely on the gratitude of many and the esteem
of all; but, God help us who are wits or witting
by profession, if we stand not for fame there, we
sink unsupported!

I am highly flattered by the news you tell me of
Coila.* I may say to the fair painter who does me
so much honour, as Dr. Beattie says to Ross the
poet of his muse Scota, from which, by the bye, I
took the idea of Coila: ("Tis a poem of Beattie's
in the Scots dialect, which perhaps you have
never seen.)

“ Ye shak your head, but o' my fegs,
Ye've set old Scota on her legs:
Lang had she line wi' buffe and flegs,
 Bombar'd and dizzie,
Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs,
 Waes me, poor hissie!”

and Ayrshire, it being Sunday, I turned my
 its to psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs ;
 our favourite air *Captain Okean* coming at
 in my head, I tried these words to it. You
 e that the first part of the tune must be re-

I tolerably pleased with these verses ; but, as
 only a sketch of the tune, I leave it with you
 if they suit the measure of the music.

am so harassed with care and anxiety about
 a farming project of mine, that my muse has
 raged into the veriest prose-wench that ever
 cinders or followed a tinker. When I am
 got into the routine of business, I shall trou-
 u with a longer epistle ; perhaps with some
 s respecting farming : at present, the world
 ch a load on my mind, that it has effaced al-
 every trace of the * * * * in me.

very best compliments and good wishes to
 leghorn.

XXXVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 28th April, 1788.

DAM,
 powers of reprehension must be great indeed,
 assure you they made my heart ache with peni-
 l pangs, even though I was really not guilty.
 commence farmer at Whitsunday, you will

re the Bard gives the first stanza of the *Chevalier's*
 it.

easily guess I must be pretty busy! but that is n all. As I got the offer of the excise-business with out solicitation; and as it costs me only six month attendance for instructions to entitle me to a commission, which commission lies by me, and at a future period, on my simple petition, can be resumed; I thought five-and-thirty pounds a-year was a bad dernier resort for a poor poet, if fortune, in her jade tricks, should kick him down from the litt eminence to which she has lately helped him up.

For this reason, I am at present attending the instructions, to have them completed before Whi sunday. Still, madam, I prepared, with the sincerest pleasure, to meet you at the Mount, as I came to my brother's on Saturday night, to set off on Sunday; but for some nights preceding, I had slept in an apartment where the force of the wind and rains was only mitigated by being sifted through numberless apertures in the windows, walls, &c. in consequence, I was on Sunday, Monday, and part of Tuesday, unable to stir out of bed, with all the miserable effects of a violent cold.

You see, madam, the truth of the French maxim *Le vrai n'est pas toujours le vrai-semblable*. Your last was so full of expostulation, and was something so like the language of an offended friend, that I began to tremble for a correspondence which I had with grateful pleasure set down as one of the greatest enjoyments of my future life.

* * * * *

Your books have delighted me: Virgil, Dryden, and Tasso, were all equally strangers to me: but *this more at large* in my next.

XXXVII.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

Mauchline, 3d May, 1788.

SIR,

I ENCLOSE you one or two more of my bagatelles. If the fervent wishes of honest gratitude have any influence with that great unknown Being, who frames the chain of causes and events, prosperity and happiness will attend your visit to the Continent, and return you safe to your native shore.

Wherever I am, allow me, sir, to claim it as my privilege to acquaint you with my progress in my trade of rhymes; as I am sure I could say it with truth, that, next to my little fame, and the having it in my power to make life more comfortable to those whom nature has made dear to me, I shall ever regard your countenance, your friendly good offices, as the most valued consequence of my late success in life.

XXXVIII.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 4th May, 1788.

MADAM,

DRYDEN'S Virgil has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the Georgics are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is,

indeed, a species of writing entirely new to me, and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation : but, alas ! when I read the Georgics, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony, drawn up by the side of a thoroughbred hunter, to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the *Æneid*. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the lettered critic ; but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind, when I say, that I think Virgil, in many instances, a *servile* copier of Homer. If I had the *Odyssey* by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved Homer. Nor can I think there is any thing of this owing to the translators ; for, from every thing I have seen of Dryden, I think him, in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion : in some future letter you shall have my ideas of him ; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect, as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

XXXIX.

TO THE SAME.

27th May, 1788.

MADAM,

I HAVE been torturing my philosophy to no purpose to account for that kind partiality of yours, which, unlike * * * * *

has followed me in my return to the shade of life, with assiduous benevolence. Often did I regret, in the fleeting hours of my late Will-o'-Wisp appearance, that "here I had no continuing city;" and, but for the consolation of a few solid guineas, could almost lament the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of my road through life, insignificance and poverty.

• • • • •

There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life, that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me), than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of a cottage. Last afternoon I had the honour to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fireside, where the planks that composed the floor, were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. 'Tis now about term-day, and there has been a revolution among those creatures, who, though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers, of the same nature with madame, are from time to time, their nerves, their sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts, sold for months and years, * * * * *

* * * not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but the caprices of the important few.* We talked of the insignificant creatures; nay, notwith-

* Servants, in Scotland, are hired from term to term; i. e. from Whitsunday to Martinmas, &c.

standing their general stupidity and rascality, did some of the poor devils the honour to commend them. But, light be the turf upon his breast who taught—"Reverence thyself." We looked down on the unpolished wretches, their impertinent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.

* * * * *

XL.

TO THE SAME.

Ellisland, 13th June, 1788.

"Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart, untravell'd, fondly turns to thee;
Still to my friend it turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthen'd chain."

GOLDSMITH.

THIS is the second day, my honoured friend, that I have been on my farm. A solitary inmate of an old smoky *Spence*; far from every object I love, or by whom I am beloved; nor any acquaintance older than yesterday, except Jenny Geddes, the old mare I ride on: while uncouth cares and novel plans hourly insult my awkward ignorance and bashful inexperience. There is a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care, consequently the dreary objects seem larger than the life. Extreme *sensibility*, irritated and prejudged on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments, at

God of my existence when the soul is laying
 cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I be-
 lieve the principal cause of this unhappy frame of

"The valiant, in himself, what can he suffer?
 Or what need he regard his *single* woes?" &c.

My surmise, madam, is just; I am indeed a
 and.

* * *

found a once much-loved and still much-loved
 creature, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of
 naked elements; but as I enabled her to *pur-*
chase a shelter; and there is no sporting with a
 low-creature's happiness or misery.

The most placid good-nature and sweetness of
 disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with
 all its powers to love me; vigorous health and
 rightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage
 by a more than commonly handsome figure; these,
 I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though
 she should never have read a page but *the Scriptures*
of the Old and New Testament, nor have danced in
 a brighter assembly than a penny-pay wedding.

* * *

XLI.

EXTRACT FROM HIS COMMON-PLACE BOOK.

Ellisland, Sunday, 14th June, 1788.

This is now the third day that I have been in this
 country. 'Lord, what is man!' What a bustling

‘ Tell us, ye dead ;
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret,
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be ?
————— A little time
Will make us wise as you are, and as close.’

I am such a coward in life, so tired of the ser that I would almost at any time, with Mil Adam, ‘ gladly lay me in my mother’s lap, at at peace.’

But a wife and children bind me to struggle the stream, till some sudden squall shall overse silly vessel ; or in the listless return of year own craziness reduce it to a wreck. Farewell to those giddy follies, those varnished vices, w though half-sanctified by the bewitching lev wit and humour, are at best but thriftless with the precious current of existence ; nay, poisoning the whole, that, like the plains of Je *the water is naught and the ground barren,* a thing short of a supernaturally-gifted Elish ~~man~~ after heal the evils.

These joined their warmest suffrages, their most powerful solicitations, with a rooted attachment, to urge the step I have taken. Nor have I any reason on *her* part to repent it.—I can fancy how, but have never seen where, I could have made a better choice. Come, then, let me act up to my favourite motto, that glorious passage in Young—

‘ On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man !’

XLII.

TO MR. P. HILL.

MY DEAR HILL.

I SHALL say nothing at all to your mad present — you have long and often been of important service to me, and I suppose you mean to go on conferring obligations until I shall not be able to lift up my face before you. In the mean time, as air Roger de Coverley, because it happened to be a cold day in which he made his will, ordered his servants great coats for mourning, so, because I have been this week plagued with an indigestion, I have sent you by the carrier a fine old ewe-milk cheese.

Indigestion is the devil: nay, 'tis the devil and all. It besets a man in every one of his senses. I lose my appetite at the sight of successful knavery, and sicken to loathing at the noise and nonsense of self-important folly. When the hollow-hearted wretch takes me by the hand, the feeling spoils my dinner; the proud man's wine so offends my palate

sions, let me prescribe for you
my cheese. I know that you are no niggard
your good things among your friends, and so
they are in much need of a slice. Their
eye is our friend, Smellie; a man positively
first abilities and greatest strength of mind, as
as one of the best hearts and keenest wits
ever met with; when you see him, as, alas! he
smarting at the pinch of distressful circumst
aggravated by the sneer of contumelious
ness—a bit of my cheese alone will not cure
but if you add a tankard of brown stout, and
add a magnum of right Oporto, you will see
sorrrows vanish like the morning mist before
summer sun.

C * * * h, the earliest friend, except my
brother, that I have on earth, and one of the
worthiest fellows that ever any man called
name of friend, if a luncheon of my cheese
help to rid him of some of his superabundant
desty, you would do well to give it him.

David.* with his *Courant*, comes too, and

hing, but when thrown at a man in a
oes not at all improve his figure, not to
e irreparable loss of the egg.

ious friend, D * * * r, I would wish also
taker; not to digest his spleen, for that
off; but to digest his last night's wine at
ld-day of the Crochallan corps.*

our common friends, I must not forget
: dearest of them, Cunningham. The
nsolence, and selfishness of a world un-
having such a fellow as he is in it, I know
is stomach; and if you can help him to
hat will make him a little easier on that
ll be very obliging.

rest J * * * S * * * e; he is such a con-
py man, that I know not what can annoy
ot perhaps he may not have got the bet-
cel of modest anecdotes which a certain
him one night at supper, the last time
et was in town.

I have mentioned so many men of law,
e nothing to do with them professedly.—
are beyond my prescription. As to their
at is another thing; God knows, they
to digest!

gy I pass by; their profundity of erudi-
their liberality of sentiment; their total
ide, and their detestation of hypocrisy,
erbiably notorious as to place them far,
ther my praise or censure.

ng to mention a man of worth, whom I
onour to call friend, the laird of Craig-

* A club of choice spirits.

tical conduct.

I have just this moment an opportunity of a
vate hand to Edinburgh, as perhaps you would
digest double postage.

XLIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 2d August, 17

HONOURED MADAM,

YOUR kind letter welcomed me, yesternigh
Ayrshire. I am indeed seriously angry with
at the *quantum* of your *luck-penny*; but, vexed
hurt as I was, I could not help laughing very
tily at the noble lord's apology for the misse
kin.

I would write you from Nithsdale, and gi
my direction there, but I have scarce an op
nity of calling at a post office once in a fortni
from Dumfries, and scarcely at

sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith." The repository of these "sorrows of the heart," is a kind of *sanctum sanctorum*: and 'tis only a chosen friend, and that too at particular sacred times, who dares enter into them.

"Heaven oft tears the bosom chords
That nature finest strung."

You will excuse this quotation for the sake of the author. Instead of entering on this subject farther, I shall transcribe you a few lines I wrote in a hermitage belonging to a gentleman in my Nithsdale neighbourhood. They are almost the only favours the muses have conferred on me in that country.

"Thou whom chance may hither lead."

See Poems.

Since I am in the way of transcribing, the following were the production of yesterday as I jogged through the wild hills of New Cumnock. I intend inserting them, or something like them, in an epistle I am going to write to the gentleman on whose friendship my excise-hopes depend, Mr. Graham of Fintry, one of the worthiest and most accomplished gentlemen, not only of this country, but I will dare to say it, of this age. The following are just the first crude thoughts "unhousel'd, unanointed, un-anneal'd."

* * * * *

Pity the tuneful muses' helpless train:
Weak, timid landsmen on life's stormy main:
The world were blest, did bliss on them depend;
Ah! that "the friendly e'er should want a friend!"

The little fate bestows they share as soon ;
 Unlike sage, proverb'd, wisdom's hard-wrung boon.
 Let prudence number o'er each sturdy son
 Who life and wisdom at one race begun ;
 Who feel by reason, and who give by rule ;
 (Instinct's a brute, and sentiment a fool !)
 Who make poor *will do* wait upon *I should* ;
 We own they're prudent, but who owns they're good ?

Ye wise ones, hence ! ye hurt the social eye !
 God's image rudely etch'd on base alloy !
 But come

Here the muse left me. I am astonished at what you tell me of Anthony's writing me. I never received it. Poor fellow ! you vex me much by telling me that he is unfortunate. I shall be in Ayrshire ten days from this date. I have just room for an old Roman farewell !

XLIV.

TO THE SAME.

Mauchline, 10th August, 1788.

MY MUCH HONOURED FRIEND,
 YOURS of the 24th June is before me. I found it, as well as another valued friend—my wife, waiting to welcome me to Ayrshire : I met both with the sincerest pleasure.

When I write you, madam, I do not sit down to answer every paragraph of yours, by echoing every sentiment, like the faithful Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, answering a speech from the best of kings ! I express myself in the

ness of my heart, and may perhaps be guilty of neglecting some of your kind inquiries; but not, from your very odd reason, that I do not read your letters. All your epistles for several months have cost me nothing, except a swelling throb of gratitude, or a deep-felt sentiment of veneration.

Mrs. Burns, madam, is the identical woman

* * * * *

When she first found herself "as women wish to be who love their lords," as I loved her nearly to distraction, we took steps for a private marriage. Her parents got the hint; and not only forbade me her company and the house, but, on my rumoured West-Indian voyage, got a warrant to put me in jail till I should find security in my about-to-be paternal relation. You know my lucky reverse of fortune. On my eclatant return to Mauchline, I was made very welcome to visit my girl. The usual consequences began to betray her; and as I was at that time laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, she was turned, literally turned out of doors: and I wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return, when our marriage was declared. Her happiness or misery were in my hands; and who could trifle with such a deposit?

* * * * *

I can easily *fancy* a more agreeable companion for my journey of life, but, upon my honour, I have never *seen* the individual instance.

* * * * *

Circumstanced as I am, I could never have got a female partner for life, who could have entered into

madame) are sometimes to be found
of the upper ranks, but almost univ
the misses of the would-be gentry.

* * * * *

I like your way in your church-yard
Thoughts that are the spontaneous
dental situations, either respecting h
company, have often a strength, a
originality, that would in vain be loo
cied circumstances and studied par
me, I have often thought of keepi
progression, by me, to send you wher
written out. Now I talk of sheets, I
my reason for writing to you on pap
my pruriency of writing to you at
of post is on such a dis-social,
scale, that I cannot abide it ; and d
least in my miscellaneous reverie
monstrous tax in a close correspon

"Why droops my heart with fancied woes forlorn?
Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky?"

* * * * *

My increasing cares in this, as yet, strange country—gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of futurity—consciousness of my own inability for the struggle of the world—my broadened mark to misfortune in a wife and children;—I could indulge these reflections, till my humour should ferment into the most acid chagrin, that would corrode the very thread of life.

To counterwork these baneful feelings, I have sat down to write to you; as I declare upon my soul, I always find *that* the most sovereign balm for my wounded spirit.

I was yesterday at Mr. ***'s to dinner, for the first time. My reception was quite to my mind: from the lady of the house, quite flattering. She sometimes hits on a couplet or two, *impromptu*. She repeated one or two to the admiration of all present. My suffrage, as a professional man, was expected: I for once went agonizing over the belly of my conscience. Pardon me, ye, my adored household gods—Independence of Spirit, and Integrity of Soul! In the course of conversation, *Johnson's Musical Museum*, a collection of Scottish songs with the music, was talked of. We got a song on the harpsichord, beginning,

"Raving winds around her blowing."

See *Songs*.

The air was much admired: the lady of the house

asked me whose were the words; "Mine, madam — they are indeed my very best verses:" she took not the smallest notice of them! The old Scottish proverb says well, "king's caff is better than ither folk's corn." I was going to make a New Testament quotation about "casting pearls;" but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste.

* * * * *

After all that has been said on the other side of the question, man is by no means a happy creature. I do not speak of the selected few, favoured by partial heaven; whose souls are tuned to gladness, amid riches and honours, and prudence and wisdom. I speak of the neglected many, whose nerves, whose sinews, whose days, are sold to the minions of fortune.

If I thought you had never seen it, I would transcribe for you a stanza of an old Scottish ballad, called *The Life and Age of Man*; beginning thus:

" 'Twas in the sixteenth hunder year
Of God and fifty-three,
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear,
As writings testifie."

I had an old grand-uncle, with whom my mother lived a while in her girlish years; the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died, during which time, his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of *The Life and Age of Man*.

It is this way of thinking, it is these melancholy truths, that make religion so precious to the poor

children of men — if it is a mere phan-
g only in the heated imagination of

t truth on earth so precious as the lie?"

reasonings sometimes make me a little
out the necessities of my heart always
old philosophisings the lie. Who looks
rt weaned from earth; the soul affianced
; the correspondence fixed with heaven;
supplication and devout thanksgiving,
the vicissitudes of even and morn; who
meet with these in the court, the palace,
: of public life? No: to find them in
ous importance and divine efficacy, we
1 among the obscure recesses of disap-
affliction, poverty, and distress.

e, dear madam, you are now *more* than
h the *length* of my letters. I return to
iddle of next week: and it quickens my
nk that there will be a letter from you
: there. I must be here again very soon
est.

XLVI.

R. GRAHAM, ESQ. OF FINTRY.

ad the honour of being introduced to
ol-house, I did not think so soon of
our of you. When Lear, in Shakspeare,
ent why he wished to be in his service,

he answers, "Because you have that in your face which I could like to call master." For some such reason, sir, do I now solicit your patronage. You know, I dare say, of an application I lately made to your Board to be admitted an officer of excise. I have, according to form, been examined by a supervisor, and to-day I gave in his certificate, with a request for an order for instructions. In this affair, if I succeed, I am afraid I shall but too much need a patronising friend. Propriety of conduct as a man, and fidelity and attention as an officer, I dare engage for; but with any thing like business, except manual labour, I am totally unacquainted.

* * * * *

I had intended to have closed my late appearance on the stage of life in the character of a country-farmer; but, after discharging some filial and fraternal claims, I find I could only fight for existence in that miserable manner, which I have lived to see throw a venerable parent into the jaws of a jail; whence death, the poor man's last and often best friend, rescued him.

I know, sir, that to need your goodness is to have a claim on it: may I therefore beg your patronage to forward me in this affair, till I be appointed to a division, where, by the help of rigid economy, I will try to support that independence so dear to my soul, but which has been too often so distant from my situation.

"When Nature her great master-piece design

Ser

XLVII.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

Mauchline, 1st October, 1788.

I HAVE been here in this country about three days, and all that time my chief reading has been the "Address to Loch-Lomond," you were so obliging as to send to me. Were I impannelled one of the author's jury to determine his criminality respecting the sin of poesy, my verdict should be "guilty! A poet of Nature's making." It is an excellent method for improvement, and what I believe every poet does, to place some favourite classic author, in his own walks of study and composition, before him as a model. Though your author had not mentioned the name, I could have, at half a glance, guessed his model to be Thomson. Will my brother-poet forgive me, if I venture to hint, that his imitation of that immortal bard is, in two or three places, rather more servile than such a genius as his required.

— e. g.

To soothe the madding passions all to peace.

Address.

To soothe the throbbing passions into peace.

Thomson.

I think the *Address* is, in simplicity, harmony, and elegance of versification, fully equal to the *Seasons*. Like Thomson, too, he has looked into nature for himself: you meet with no copied description. One particular criticism I made at first

reading; in no one instance has he said too much. He never flags in his progress, but, like a true poet of Nature's making, kindles in his course. His beginning is simple and modest, as if distrustful of the strength of his pinion; only, I do not altogether like—

" Truth,
The soul of every song that's nobly great."

Fiction is the soul of many a song that is nobly great. Perhaps I am wrong: this may be but a prose-criticism. Is not the phrase, in *line 7*, page 6, "Great lake," too much vulgarized by everyday language, for so sublime a poem?

" Great-mass' of waters, theme for nobler song,"

is perhaps no emendation. His enumeration of a comparison with other lakes is at once harmonious and poetic. Every reader's ideas must sweep the

" Winding margin of an hundred miles."

The perspective that follows mountains blue—the imprisoned billows beating in vain—the wooded isles—the digression on the yew-tree—"Ben-Lomond's lofty cloud-envelop'd head," &c., are beautiful. A thunder-storm is a subject which has been often tried; yet our poet, in his grand picture, has interjected a circumstance, so far as I know, entirely original:

" The gloom
Deep-seam'd with frequent streaks of moving fire."

In his preface to the Storm, "The glens, how dark between!" is noble highland landscape! The "rain ploughing the red mould," too, is beautifully fancied. Ben-Lomond's "lofty pathless top," is a

od expression ; and the surrounding view from it truly great ; the

“ Silver mist
Beneath the beaming sun,”

well described ; and here he has contrived to en-
ren his poem with a little of that passion which
ds fair, I think, to usurp the modern muses alto-
ther. I know not how far this episode is a beauty
on the whole ; but the swain's wish to carry
some faint idea of the vision bright,” to enter-
in her “ partial listening ear,” is a pretty thought.
ut, in my opinion, the most beautiful passages in
ie whole poem are the fowls crowding, in wintry
osts, to Loch-Lomond's “ hospitable flood ;” their
heeling round, their lighting, mixing, diving,
c.; and the glorious description of the sportsman.
his last is equal to any thing in the *Seasons*. The
lea of “ the floating tribes distant seen, far glis-
tering to the moon,” provoking his eye as he is
bliged to leave them, is a noble ray of poetic ge-
ius. “ The howling winds,” the “ hideous roar”
f “ the white cascades,” are all in the same style.

I forget that, while I am thus holding forth, with
he heedless warmth of an enthusiast, I am perhaps
iring you with nonsense. I must, however, men-
ion, that the last verse of the sixteenth page is one
f the most elegant compliments I have ever seen.

must likewise notice that beautiful paragraph, be-
inning, “ The gleaming lake,” &c. I dare not go
nto the particular beauties of the two last para-
raphs, but they are admirably fine, and truly Os-
ianic.

I must beg your pardon for this lengthened

scrawl. I had no idea of it when I began — I should like to know who the author is ; but, whoever he be, please present him with my grateful thanks for the entertainment he has afforded me.*

A friend of mine desired me to commission for him two books, *Letters on the Religion essential to Man*, a book you sent me before ; and, *The World Unmasked, or the Philosopher the greatest Cheat*. Send me them by the first opportunity. The *Bible* you sent me is truly elegant. I only wish it had been in two volumes.

XLVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, AT MOREHAM MAINS.

Mauchline, 13th Nov. 1788.

MADAM,

I HAD the very great pleasure of dining at Dunlop yesterday. Men are said to flatter women because they are weak ; if it is so, poets must be weaker still ; for Misses R. and K., and Miss G. M'K., with their flattering attentions and artful compliments, absolutely turned my head. I own they did not lard me over as many a poet does his patron * * * * * but they so intoxicated me with their sly insinuations and delicate inuendoes of compliment, that if it had not been for a lucky recollection, how much additional weight

* The poem, entitled, *An Address to Loch-Lomond*, is said to be written by a gentleman, now one of the Masters of the High-school at Edinburgh ; and the same who translated the beautiful story of the *Paria*, as published in the *Bee* of Dr. Anderson.

and lustre your good opinion and friendship must give me in that circle, I had certainly looked upon myself as a person of no small consequence. I dare not say one word how much I was charmed with the Major's friendly welcome, elegant manner, and acute remark, lest I should be thought to balance my orientalisms of applause over against the finest quey* in Ayrshire, which he made me a present of to help and adorn my farm-stock. As it was on Hallow-day, I am determined annually, as that day returns, to decorate her horns with an ode of gratitude to the family of Dunlop.

• • • • •

So soon as I know of your arrival at Dunlop, I will take the first conveniency to dedicate a day, or perhaps two, to you and friendship, under the guarantee of the Major's hospitality. There will be soon three score and ten miles of permanent distance between us; and now that your friendship and friendly correspondence is entwisted with the heart-strings of my enjoyment of life, I must indulge myself in a happy day of "The feast of reason and the flow of soul."

XLIX.

TO • • • • •

Nov. 8, 1788.

SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and gloomy secta-

* Heifer.

ries have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us ; still the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed, or insolence to the fallen, are held by all mankind, shows that they are not natives of the human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind, who is undone, the bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes ;—who but sympathises with the miseries of this ruined profligate brother? we forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went, last Wednesday to my parish-church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgments to the AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for the consequent blessings of the glorious Revolution. To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious : to it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family, the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness of his rights.

Bred and educated in revolution principles, the principles of reason and common sense, it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh, abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the House of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils ; and we may bless God for all his goodness to us as a nation, without, at the same time, cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who *only* harboured ideas, and made attempts, that most

of us would have done had we been in their situation.

“The bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart,” may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present Royal Family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects' rights? Might not the epithets of “bloody and tyrannical” be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, sir, seems to be this:—At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was, like other sciences and other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the struggling liberties of his people: with us, luckily, the monarch failed, and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the justling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine; but likewise, happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family,

at for the folly and impracticability of
in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I ble
but cannot join in the ridicule against them
does not know that the abilities or defects o
and commanders are often hidden, until pu
touchstone of exigency ; and that there is
of fortune, an omnipotence in particular
and conjunctures of circumstances, which ex
heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as the
or against us ?

Man, Mr. Publisher, is a strange, weak
sistent being : who would believe, sir, that
our Augustan age of liberality and ref
while we seem so justly sensible and jealou
rights and liberties, and animated with
dignation against the very memory of th
would have subverted them—that a cert
under our national protection, should com
against our monarch and a few favourit
but against OUR WHOLE LEGISLATIVE BOI
-llar oppression, and almost in the very st

To conclude, Sir: let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.*

L.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 17th Dec. 1788.

MY DEAR HONOURED FRIEND,
YOURS, dated Edinburgh, which I have just read, makes me very unhappy. "Almost blind, and wholly deaf," are melancholy news of human nature; but when told of a much-loved and honoured friend, they carry misery in the sound. Goodness on your part, and gratitude on mine, began a tie, which has gradually and strongly entwisted itself among the dearest cords of my bosom; and I tremble at the omens of your late and present ailing habit and shattered health. You miscalculate matters widely, when you forbid my waiting on you, lest it should hurt my worldly concerns. My small scale of farming is exceedingly more simple and easy than what you have lately seen at Moreham Mains. But be that as it may, the heart of the

* This letter was sent to the publisher of some newspaper, probably the publisher of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

man, and the fancy of the poet, are the two *grand* considerations for which I live : if miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any idea superior to breaking of clods, and picking up grubs, not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards, creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time—If you continue so deaf, I am afraid a visit will be of no great pleasure to either of us ; but if I hear you are got so well again as to be able to relish conversation, look you to it, Madam, for I will make my threatenings good. I am to be at the new-year-day fair of Ayr, and, by all that is sacred in the word Friend ! I *will* come and see you.



Your meeting, which you so well describe, with your old school-fellow and friend, was truly interesting. Out upon the ways of the world!—They spoil these “social offsprings of the heart.” Two veterans of the “men of the world” would have met with little more heart-workings than two old hacks worn out on the road. A-propos, is not the Scotch phrase, “Auld lang syne,” exceedingly expressive.—There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul. You know I am an enthusiast in old Scotch songs : I shall give you the verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr. Kerr will save you the postage.*

* “Should auld acquaintance be forgot.”

See *Songs*.

Light be the turf on the breast of the Heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment ! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than half a dozen of modern English Bacchanalians. Now I am on my hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas which please me mightily.

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
 An' fill it in a silver tassie;
 That I may drink, before I go,
 A service to my bonnie lassie :
 The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith;
 Fu' loud the wind blows frae the ferry ;
 The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
 And I maun lea'e my bonnie Mary.

The trumpets sound, the banners fly,
 The glittering spears are ranked ready ;
 The shouts o' war are heard afar,
 The battle closes thick and bloody !
 But it's not the roar o' sea or shore
 Wad make me langer wish to tarry ;
 Nor shouts o' war that's heard afar ;
 It's leaving thee, my bonnie Mary.

LI.

TO MISS DAVIES,

*(A young Lady who had heard he had been making
 a Ballad on her, enclosing that Ballad.)*

December, 1788.

MADAM,

I UNDERSTAND my very worthy neighbour, Mr. Riddel, has informed you that I have made you the

subject of some verses. There is something voking in the idea of being the burden of a that I do not think Job or Moses, though patterns of patience and meekness, could have resisted the curiosity to know what that ballad so my worthy friend has done me a mischief, I dare say, he never intended; and reduced the unfortunate alternative of leaving you contented, or else disgusting you with the verses, the unfinished production of a random, and never meant to have met your eye. I have heard or read somewhere of a gentleman who had some genius, much eccentricity, and considerable dexterity with his pencil. In the incidental group of life into which one is thrown wherever this gentleman met with a character more than ordinary degree congenial to his humour, he used to steal a sketch of the face, merely said, as a *nota bene* to point out the agreeable collection to his memory. What this gentleman's pencil was to him is my muse to me: the verses I do myself the honour to send you; a *memento* exactly of the same kind that I indulged in.

It may be more owing to the fastidiousness and caprice, than the delicacy of my taste, but I am often tired, disgusted, and hurt, with the affectation, and pride of mankind, that I meet with a person "after my own heart" who sensitively feel what an orthodox Protestant call a species of idolatry, which acts on me like inspiration; and I can no more desist from the impulse, than an Eolian harp can resist the tones to the streaming air. A distich or two

be the consequence, though the object which hit my fancy were gray-bearded age: but where my theme is youth and beauty, a young lady whose personal charms, wit, and sentiment, are equally striking and unaffected, by heavens! though I had lived threescore years a married man, and threescore years before I was a married man, my imagination would hallow the very idea; and I am truly sorry that the enclosed stanzas have done such poor justice to such a subject.

LII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, New-Year-Day Morning.

THIS, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes; and would to God that I came under the apostle James's description!—*the prayer of a righteous man avail-eth much*. In that case, Madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: every thing that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment, should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste should be yours. I own myself so little a presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day, the first Sunday of May, a breezy blue-skied noon, some time about the beginning,

and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end of autumn;—these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

* * * * *

I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the Spectator, "The Vision of Mirza;" a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables, "On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild-briar rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing. Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Eolian harp, *passive*, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something

us above the trodden clod? - I own myself
to such proofs of those awful and important
es—a God that made all things—man's im-
al and immortal nature—and a world of
r woe beyond death and the grave.

* * * * *

LIII.

TO DR. MOORE.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 4th Jan. 1789.

en as I think of writing to you, which has
three or four times every week these six
s, it gives me something so like the idea of
inary-sized statue offering at a conversation
he Rhodian colossus, that my mind misgives
nd the affair always miscarries somewhere
en purpose and resolve. I have at last got
business with you, and business-letters are
n by the style-book. I say my business is
ou, sir, for you never had any with me; ex-
ne business that benevolence has in the man-
poverty.

character and employment of a poet were
ly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I
that a very great deal of my late eclat was
to the singularity of my situation, and the
prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said
preface to my first edition, I do look upon
as having some pretensions from Nature to
tic character. I have not a doubt but the
the aptitude, to learn the Muses' trade, is a

my doctrine by the test of experience. appearance from the press I put off to a day, a day that may never arrive—but I determined to prosecute with all my vigour. I have given very few, if any of the professed talents of shining in every species of composition shall try (for until trial it is impossible whether she has qualified me to shine in any). The worst of it is, by the time one has written a piece, it has been so often viewed and re-viewed before the mental eye, that one loses, in a measure, the powers of critical discrimination. The best criterion I know is a friend—naturally able to judge, but with good-nature and like a prudent teacher with a young scholar. I praise perhaps a little more than is exact, but the thin-skinned animal fall into that number. I am sensible of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking vanity of himself. Dare I, sir, already indebted to your goodness, ask the addition of your being that friend to me?

I believe I shall, in whole, 100%. copy-right included, clear about 400%. some little odds; and even part of this depends upon what the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the honour to interest yourself much in my welfare.

* * * * *

To give the rest of my story in brief, I have married "my Jean," and taken a farm: with the first step I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied; with the last it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother, who supports my aged mother; another still younger brother, and three sisters, in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh, it cost me about 180%. to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much—I only interposed between my brother and his impending fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged; and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour, might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*. There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy: I have an excise-officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr. Graham, who is one of the commissioners of excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a treasury warrant, for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c.

* * * * *

Thus secure of a livelihood, "to thee, sweet poet delightful maid!" I would consecrate my future days.

LIV.

TO PROFESSOR D. STEWART.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 20th Jan. 1786

SIR,

THE enclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the Continent. I have added a few more of my productions, the first of which I am indebted to the Nithsdale muse. The piece inscribed to R. G. esq. is a copy of verse I sent Mr. Graham, of Fintry, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter, to me, of very great moment. To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted, for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me; but do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the "Poet's Progress." The fragments, if my design succeeds, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions ripened by years; of course I do not wish it much known. The fragment beginning "A little, upright, pert, tart," &c. I have not shown to man living, till now I send you. It forms the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This part

part I send you merely as a sample of my
at portrait-sketching; but lest idle conjecture
pretend to point out the original, please let
or your single, sole inspection.

d I make any apology for this trouble to a
man who has treated me with such marked
plence and peculiar kindness; who has en-
into my interests with so much zeal, and on
critical decisions I can so fully depend? A
as I am by trade, these decisions to me are of
st consequence. My late transient acquaint-
among some of the mere rank and file of
less, I resign with ease; but to the distin-
d champions of genius and learning I shall
er ambitious of being known. The native
; and accurate discernment in Mr. Stewart's
d strictures; the justness (iron justice, for he
o bowels of compassion for a poor poetic sin-
of Dr. Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of
isor Dalzel's taste, I shall ever revere. I shall
Edinburgh some time next month.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your highly obliged,

and very humble servant,

ROBERT BURNS.

LV.

TO BISHOP GEDDES.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 3d Feb. 1789.

NERABLE FATHER,

am conscious, that wherever I am you do me
honour to interest yourself in my welfare, it

L. I.

G

gives me pleasure to inform you that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions—what I am? where I am? and for what I am destined?

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were encumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would to me ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice.

* * * * *

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm; but should they fail, I have an excise commission, which, on my simple petition, will at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an excise-officer, but I do not intend to borrow honour from any profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is great to any thing that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

* * * * *

s, with a rational aim and method in life, may easily guess, my reverend and much-loved friend, that my characteristical trade is forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever enthusiast to the muses. I am determined to man and nature, and in that view incessantly; try if the ripening and correctious of years enable me to produce something worth pre-

will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning up on the banks of Nith. Some large poetic ideas that are floating in my imagination, or partly in execution, I shall impart to you when I have pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

My acquaintance, worthy sir, with which you are pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the merely great, I do not lose the patronising notice of the learned and good, without the bitterest regret.

LVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 4th March, 1789.

When I, my honoured friend, returned safe from my journey. To a man who has a home, however remote—if that home is like mine, the absence of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edin-

burgh will soon be a business of sickening gust.

“ Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate yo

When I must sculk into a corner, lest the equipage of some gaping blockhead should rime in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim, “merits has he had, or what demerit have I in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, a key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked about the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride?” I have read somewhere of a monarch (Spain I think it was), who was so out of humour with the Ptolemean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with stealth through the pomp of Princes-street, a thought suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his coat, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we do in a perspective. This trifling alteration, I mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb-sinews of his majesty's liege subjects, in the way of saving the head and tiptoe-strutting, would eventually turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us to adjust the ceremonials in making a becoming way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of rev

or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring-glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right, madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is by far too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr. Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances; and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the mean time, allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine * * * * *. I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them be any real improvement.

Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause,
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming * * * *, seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,

TO THE REV. P. CARFRAE.

REV. SIR,

I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer
of shame, than on looking at the date of your
giving letter which accompanied Mr. Mylne's

* * * * *

I am much to blame: the honour Mr. M. has
done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the
dear, though melancholy circumstance
of the last production of his muse, deserving
return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending
the poem to some periodical publication. On
second thoughts, I am afraid that, in this
case, it would be an improper step. It is
perhaps as much accidental as merited, in
an inundation of nonsense under the name

ine, &c., be at all prudent, in my opinion, it
ainly should not be a Scottish poem. The pro-
s of the labours of a man of genius are, I hope, as
honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr. Mylne's
relations are most justly entitled to that honest har-
vest which fate has denied himself to reap. But let
the friends of Mr. Mylne's fame (among whom I
crave the honour of ranking myself) always keep
in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet,
and take no measure that, before the world knows
any thing about him, would risk his name and
character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, Sir, some experience of publishing, and
the way in which I would proceed with Mr. Mylne's
poems is this: I would publish in two or three
English and Scottish public papers, any one of his
English poems which should, by private judges, be
thought the most excellent, and mention it, at the
same time, as one of the productions of a Lothian
farmer, of respectable character, lately deceased,
whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish
soon, by subscription, for the sake of his numerous
family:—not in pity to that family, but in justice
to what his friends think the poetic merits of the
deceased; and to secure, in the most effectual man-
ner, to those tender connexions, whose right it is,
the pecuniary reward of those merits.

SIR,

THE gentleman who will deliver you this is Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighborhood and a very particular acquaintance of mine have troubled him with this packet, I mu him over to your goodness, to recompense it in a way in which he much needs your ass and where you can effectually serve him Nielson is on his way for France, to wait the grace of Queensberry, on some little business of good deal of importance to him, and he wishes your instructions respecting the most eligible of travelling, &c., for him, when he has crossed the channel. I should not have dared to take liberty with you, but that I am told, by the have the honour of your personal acquaintance that, to be a poor honest Scotchman, is of recommendation to you, and that to be in your power to serve such a character gives me much pleasure.

* * * * *

diality. However, in the particular part
act which roused my poetic wrath, she
ess blameable. In January last, on my
shire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's
; the only tolerable inn in the place.
as keen, and the grim evening and howl-
were ushering in a night of snow and
horse and I were both much fatigued
abours of the day; and just as my
bailie and I were bidding defiance to the
a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral
f the late great Mrs. * * *, and poor I
to brave all the horrors of the tempe-
, and jade my horse, my young favourite
n I had just christened Pegasus, twelve
er on, through the wildest moors and
shire, to New Cumnock, the next inn.
s of poesy and prose sink under me,
ld describe what I felt. Suffice it to say,
a good fire, at New Cumnock, had so far
ly frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote
l ode.

Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with
; and I must own, that, at last, he has
ble and fair with me.

I WILL make no excuses, my dear Bibliopol
forgive me for murdering language!) that I
down to write you on this vile paper.

It is economy, sir; it is that cardinal vir-
dence; so I beg you will sit down, and ei-
pose or borrow a panegyric. If you are
borrow, apply to

to compose, or rather to compound, some-
clever on my remarkable frugality; that
one of my most esteemed friends on the
paper, which was originally intended for
fist of some drunken exciseman, to take
in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thou-
sands—thou cook of fat beef and dainti-
ness—thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hosiery

as of fame are breathless, clambering, hanging
between heaven and hell; but those glittering cliffs
of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all-powerful deity,
wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and plea-
sures: where the sunny exposure of plenty, and the
hot walls of profusion, produce those blissful fruits
of luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of
paradise!—Thou withered sibyl, my sage conduct-
ress, usher me into the refulgent, adored presence!
—The power, splendid and potent as he now is, was
once the puling nursling of thy faithful care and
tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin, thy kins-
man or favourite, and adjure the god, by the scenes
of his infant years, no longer to repulse me as a
stranger, or an alien, but to favour me with his pe-
culiar countenance and protection! He daily be-
stows his greatest kindnesses on the undeserving
and the worthless—assure him that I bring ample
evidences of meritorious demerits! Pledge your-
self for me, that for the glorious cause of LUCRE, I
will do any thing—be any thing—but the horse-
steal of private oppression, or the vulture of public
robbery!

* * * * *

But to descend from heroics,

* * * * *

I want a Shakespeare; I want likewise an English
dictionary—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these
and all my prose commissions, the cheapest is always
the best for me. There is a small debt of honour
that I owe Mr. Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills,
my worthy friend, and your well-wisher. Please
give him, and urge him to take it, the first time you

see him, ten shillings worth of any thing you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun, under the direction of Captain Riddel. There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Monteith of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. Capt. R. gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for "The Monkland Friendly Society;"—a copy of *The Spectator*, *Mirror*, and *Lounger*; *Man of Feeling*, *Man of the World*, Guthrie's *Geographical Grammar*, with some religious pieces, will likewise be our first order.

When I grow richer I will write to you on gilt post, to make amends for this sheet. At present every guinea has a five-guinea errand with,

My dear sir,

Your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

LX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 4th April, 1789.

* * * * *

I no sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading these give half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

* * * * *

be a poetic whim in my head, which I at pre-
 dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the right hon.
 Fox : but how long that fancy may hold, I
 can't say. A few of the first lines I have just
 sketched, as follows :

“ How wisdom and folly meet, mix, and unite.”*

On the 20th current I hope to have the honour of
 seeing you, in person, how sincerely I am—

* * * * *

LXI.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

ElHaland, 4th May, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR *duty-free* favour of the 26th April I received
 two days ago : I will not say I perused it with plea-
 sure ; that is the cold compliment of ceremony : I
 perused it, sir, with delicious satisfaction—in short,
 it is such a letter, that not you, nor your friend, but
 the legislature, by express proviso in their postage-
 laws, should frank. A letter informed with the
 soul of friendship is such an honour to human
 nature, that they should order it free ingress and
 egress to and from their bags and mails, as an en-
 couragement and mark of distinction to super-
 eminent virtue.

* See *Poems* ;—Fragment, inscribed to the right honourable
 C. J. Fox.

FROM A NEIGHBOURING plantation, a
poor little wounded hare came cri
You will guess my indignation at the
low who could shoot a hare at this
they all of them have young ones. I
something in that business of destr
sport, individuals in the animal creat
injure us materially, which I could n
to my ideas of virtue.

“ Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'r

Let me know how you like my poem
ful whether it would not be an improv
out the last stanza but one altogethe
C * * * is a glorious production of
man. You, he, and the noble colone
F * * * are to me

“ Dear as the ruddy drops which warm

LXII.

TO MR. M'AULEY, OF DUMBARTON.

4th June, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I am not without my fears respecting my fate, at that grand, universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called *The Last Day*, yet I trust there is one sin, which that arch vagabond, Satan, who I understand is to be king's evidence, cannot throw in my teeth, I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness, for which I remain, and from inability, I fear must still remain, your debtor; but, though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear, by my old acquaintance, Mr. Kennedy, that you are, in immortal Allan's language, "Hale and weel, and living;" and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers, whom the great Manager of the drama of man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself, I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy; and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the muses,

poetic licences of former days will be
under the oblivious influence of some ge-
statute of celestial proscription. In my
votion, which, like a good presbyterian,
ally give to my household folks, I am
fond of the psalm, "Let not the er-
youth," &c., and that other, "Lo, O
God's heritage," &c.; in which last
who, by the bye, has a glorious "wood
at either old song or psalmody, joins a
pathos of Handel's Messiah.

* * * * *

LXIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 21st

DEAR MADAM,
Will you take the effusions, the miseral
of low spirits, just as they flow from

Monday Evening.

* * * * * give a ser-
 mon famous for his benevolence, and
 from such ideas of my Creator,
 per me! Religion, my honoured
 simple business, as it equally con-
 cerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and
 the rich, there is an incomprehensibly Great
 God, in whom I owe my existence, and that he
 has been fully acquainted with the operations
 of the internal machinery, and conse-
 quent deportment, of this creature which
 these are, I think, self-evident pro-
 of that there is a real and eternal distinc-
 tion between virtue and vice, and consequently,
 an accountable creature; that from the
 operations of the human mind, as well as from
 the imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in
 the distribution of affairs, both in the natural
 and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene
 beyond the grave—must, I think, be
 the very one who will give himself a mo-
 tion. I will go farther, and affirm, that
 the simplicity, excellence, and purity, of his
 precepts, unparalleled by all the ag-
 gregation and learning of many preceding
 ages, *to appearance*, he himself was the ob-
 scurest illiterate of our species; therefore
 he was from God.

* * * * *

mitigates the woes, or increases the
 others, this is my criterion of goodness;

and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

LXIV.

TO MR. * * *.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the fifth of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in * * * I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention, were, I hope, very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance: but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The * * * *, so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence; but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

* * * * *

When I received your letter, I was transcribing

* * *, my letter to the magistrates of the
 Magistrate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to
 erect a tomb-stone over poor Fergusson, and their
 refusal in consequence of my petition, but now I shall
 thank them to * * * * *. Poor Fergus-

If there be a life beyond the grave, which I
 believe there is; and if there be a good God presiding
 over all nature, which I am sure there is; thou art
 enjoying existence in a glorious world, where
 the soul of the heart alone is distinction in the man;
 the rich, deprived of all their pleasure-pur-
 suing powers, return to their native sordid mat-
 ter, where titles and honours are the disregarded
 objects of an idle dream; and where that heavy
 gloom, which is the negative consequence of steady
 success, and those thoughtless, though often de-
 structive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations
 of frail human nature, will be thrown into
 oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear sir! So soon as your present
 projects and schemes are concentrated in an aim, I
 shall be glad to hear from you; as your welfare
 and happiness is by no means a subject indif-
 ferent to

Yours, &c.

LXV.

TO MISS WILLIAMS.

1789.

SIR,

How many problems in the nature of that won-
 derful creature, Man, this is one of the most extra-
 ordinary, that he shall go on from day to day, from

excellent poem on the Slave-Trade ; and yet, wretch that I am ! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for, if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way, whenever I read a book, I mean a book in our own trade, madam, a poetic one, and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil and mark at the ends of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to show you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation ; and I do it in the firm faith, that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr. Moore where he tells me that he has sent me some books. They are not yet come to hand, but I hear th

stumbling through incautious speed, or
and through loitering neglect,

I have the honour to be, &c.

LXVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 6th September, 1789.

DAM,

mentioned, in my last, my appointment to
and the birth of little Frank, who, by
rust, will be no discredit to the honour-
of Wallace, as he has a fine manly counte-
a figure that might do credit to a little
months older; and likewise an excellent
er, though, when he pleases, he has a
not quite so loud as the horn that his
amesake blew as a signal to take out the
ing bridge.

ne time ago an epistle, part poetic, and
; from your poetess, Mrs. J. Little, a
ous but modest composition. I should
her, as she requested, but for the hurry
business. I have heard of her and her
is in this country; and I am happy to
to the honour of her character. 'The
know not well how to write to her: I
lown to a sheet of paper that I knew not
n. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-
ad except when prompted by friendship
e, or, which happens extremely rarely,
the Muse (I know not her name) that
er epistolary writing, I sit down, when

* * * * *

Would I could write you a letter
would sit down to it with as much
would to write an epic poem of my
that should equal the *Iliad*. Religion
is the true comfort. A strong persuasion
state of existence ; a proposition
bable, that, setting revelation aside
and people, so far as investigation
at least near four thousand years
mode or other firmly believed it. I
reason and pretend to doubt. I have
so to a very daring pitch ; but when
I was opposing the most ardent
most darling hopes of good men,
in face of all human belief, in all ages
at my own conduct.

I know not whether I have ever
following lines, or if you have ever seen
is one of my favourite quotations
constantly by me in my progress

'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
 Disarms affliction, or repels his dart;
 Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,
 Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies."

I have been very busy with *Zeluco*. The doctor is so obliging as to request my opinion of it; and I have been revolving in my mind some kind of criticisms on novel-writing, but it is a depth beyond research. I shall, however, digest my thoughts on the subject as well as I can. *Zeluco* is a most striking performance.

Farewell! *A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous com-
 mende!*

LXVII.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ. OF FINTRY.

9th December, 1789.

SIR,

I HAVE a good while had a wish to trouble you with a letter, and had certainly done it long ere now— but for a humiliating something that throws cold water on the resolution, as if one should say, "You have found Mr. Graham a very powerful and kind friend indeed; and that interest he is so kindly taking in your concerns, you ought, by every thing in your power, to keep alive and cherish." Now though since God has thought proper to make one powerful and another helpless, the connexion of obliger and obliged is all fair; and though my being under your patronage is to me highly honourable, yet, sir, allow me to flatter myself, that as a poet and an honest man, you first

interested yourself in my welfare, and principally as such still, you permit me to approach you.

I have found the excise-business go on a great deal smoother with me than I expected; owing good deal to the generous friendship of Mr. Mitchell, my collector, and the kind assistance of Mr. Findlater, my supervisor. I dare to be honest and I fear no labour. Nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the Muses. Their visits to me, indeed, and I believe most of their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are short and far between: but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr. I take the liberty to enclose you a few bagatelles, all of them the productions of my leisure thoughts in my excise rides.

If you know or have ever seen captain Grose the antiquarian, you will enter into any humour that is in the verses on him. Perhaps you have seen them before, as I sent them to a London newspaper. Though I dare say you have none of the solemn league-and-covenant fire, which shone so conspicuous in lord George Gordon and the Kilmarnock weavers, yet I think you must have heard of Mr. M'Gill, one of the clergymen of Ayr, and his heretical book. God help him, poor man! Though he is one of the worthiest, as well as one of the ablest of the whole priesthood of the kirk of Scotland, yet he has every sense of that ambiguous term, yet the professor and his numerous family are in imminent danger of being thrown out to the mercy of the winter-winds. The enclosed ballad on that business, I confess, too local, but I laughed myself at so

conceits in it, though I am convinced in my conscience that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too.

The election ballad, as you will see, alludes to the present canvass in our string of boroughs. I do not believe there will be such a hard-run match in the whole general election.*

* * * * *

I am too little a man to have any political attachments; I am deeply indebted to, and have the warmest veneration for, individuals of both parties; but a man who has it in his power to be the father of a country, and who * * * * * is a character that one cannot speak of with patience.

Sir J. J. does "what man can do;" but yet I doubt his fate.

LXVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 13th December, 1789.

MANY thanks, dear madam, for your sheet full of rhymes. Though at present I am below the veriest prose, yet from you every thing pleases. I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous system; a system the state of which is most conducive to our happiness—or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have

* This alludes to the contest for the borough of Dumfries, between the duke of Queensbury's interest and that of Sir James Johnstone.

man? To-day in the luxuriance of
in the enjoyment of existence; it
haps in a few hours, loaded with
being, counting the tardy pace
moments by the repercussions of
fusing or denied a comforter. Day
and night comes after day, only the
life which gives him no pleasure; the
dark termination of that life, in
which he recoils.

“ Tell us, ye dead; will none of you
Disclose the secret—
What 'tis you are, and we must
_____ 'tis no matter
A little time will make us learn'd

Can it be possible, that when I
feverish being, I shall still find my
existence? When the last gasp
nounced that I am no more to
me, and the few who loved me

benevolent, the amiable, and the humane: what a glorious idea, then, is a world to come! Would God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish. There I should meet an aged parent, now at distance from the many buffetings of an evil world, against which he so long and so bravely struggled. There should I meet the friend, the distressed friend of my early life; the man who rejoiced to see me, because he loved me and would serve me—Muir! thy weaknesses were the aberrations of human nature, but thy heart glowed with every thing generous, manly, and noble; and if ever emanation from the All-good Being animated a human form, it was thine!—There should I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognize my lost, my ever dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love.

My Mary, dear departed shade!

Where is thy place of heavenly rest?

Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?

Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust thou art no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave, is not one of the many impositions which, time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that in thee "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart in this state of existence, shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing.

I am a good deal inclined to think with those who

to write any thing more in order to
have felt too much of the ills of life
thiſe with a diſeaſed wretch, who is
than half of any faculties he poſſeſs
neſs will excuſe this diſtracted ſcr
writer dare ſcarcely read, and wi
throw into the fire were he able to
better, or indeed any thing at all.

Rumour told me ſomething of a ſc
was returned from the Eaſt or Weſt
have gotten news of James or Antho
in you not to let me know ; as I pro
ſincerity of a man who is weary of
anxious about another, that ſcarce
give me ſo much pleaſure as to he
thing befalling my honoured friend.

If you have a minute's leiſure, ta
in pity to *le pauvre miſérable*.

To store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge is certainly of very great importance, both to them as individuals, and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection, is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement; and, besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality. Impressed with this idea, a gentleman in this parish, Robert Riddel, esq. of Glenriddel, set on foot a species of circulating library, on a plan so simple as to be practicable in any corner of the country; and so useful as to deserve the notice of every country gentleman, who thinks the improvement of that part of his own species, whom chance has thrown into the humble walks of the peasant and the artisan, a matter worthy of his attention.

Mr. Riddel got a number of his own tenants, and farming neighbours, to form themselves into a society for the purpose of having a library among themselves. They entered into a legal engagement to abide by it for three years; with a saving clause or two, in case of removal to a distance, or of death. Each member, at his entry, paid five shillings; and at each of their meetings, which were held every fourth Saturday, six-pence more. With their entry-money, and the credit which they took on the faith of their future funds, they laid in a tolerable stock of books at the commencement. What authors they were to purchase, was always decided by the majority. At every meeting, all the books, under certain fines and forfeitures, by way of penalty, were to be produced; and the members had their choice of the volumes in rotation. He whose name stood for that night first on the list, had his

choice of what volume he pleased in the whole collection; the second had his choice after the first; the third after the second; and so on to the last. At next meeting, he who had been first on the list at the preceding meeting was last at this; he who had been second was first; and so on through the whole three years. At the expiration of the engagement, the books were sold by auction, but only among the members themselves; and each man had his share of the common stock, in money or in books, as he chose to be a purchaser or not.

At the breaking up of this little society, which was formed under Mr. Riddel's patronage, and what with benefactions of books from him, and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed, that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however, of this little library, were, *Blair's Sermons*, *Robertson's History of Scotland*, *Hume's History of the Stuarts*, *The Spectator*, *Idler*, *Adventurer*, *Mirror*, *Lounger*, *Observer*, *Man of Feeling*, *Man of the World*, *Chrysal*, *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, &c. A peasant who can read and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour, who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much-merited success,

I am, sir, your humble servant,

A PEASANT.

LXX.

CHARLES SHARPE, ESQ. OF HODDAM,

*a fictitious Signature, enclosing a Ballad, 1790
or 1791.*

True, sir, you are a gentleman of rank and
; and I am a poor devil: you are a feather
cap of society, and I am a very hobnail in
oes; yet I have the honour to belong to the
amily with you, and on that score I now ad-
on. You will perhaps suspect that I am go-
claim affinity with the ancient and honour-
ouse of Kilpatrick: No, no, sir: I cannot
be properly said to belong to any house, or
ny province or kingdom; as my mother, who
ny years was spouse to a marching regiment,
ae into this bad world, aboard the packet-
somewhere between Donaghadee and Port-
c. By our common family, I mean, sir, the
of the Muses. I am a fiddler and a poet;
u, I am told, play an exquisite violin, and
standard taste in the Belles Lettres. The
day, a brother cat-gut gave me a charming
air of your composition. If I was pleased with
ne, I was in raptures with the title you have
it; and, taking up the idea, I have spun it
ie three stanzas enclosed. Will you allow me,
present you them, as the dearest offering
misbegotten son of poverty and rhyme has to
I have a longing to take you by the hand
nburden my heart, by saying—"Sir, I ho-

you are unapproachable. It is true
tized me in Castalian streams, but
gipsies forgot to give me a name.
served many a good fellow, the Ni
a great deal of pleasure, but, b
they have beggared me. Would t
a little of their cast-linen ! were it
my power to say that I have a s
But the idle wenches, like Solome
“ toil not, neither do they spin ;
continue to tie my remnant of a
hangman's rope, round my naked
my galligaskins to keep together th
ed fragments. As to the affair of sh
that up. — My pilgrimages in my t
town to town, and on your stony-h
too, are what not even the hide of
could bear. The coat on my bac
shall not speak evil of the dead. It
unhandsome and ungrateful to fir
old surtout, which so kindly supp

one side, and my fiddle-case on the other, and placing my hat between my legs, I can, by means of its brim, or rather brims, go through the whole doctrine of the Conic Sections.

However, sir, don't let me mislead you, as if I would interest your pity. Fortune has so much forsaken me, that she has taught me to live without her; and, amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy than a monarch of the world. According to the hackneyed metaphor, I value the several actors in the great drama of life, simply as they act their parts. I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt; and can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect. As you, sir, go through your rôle with such distinguished merit, permit me to make one in the chorus of universal applause, and assure you that, with the highest respect,

I have the honour to be, &c.

LXXI.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

Edinburgh, 11th January, 1790.

DEAR BROTHER,

I MEAN to take advantage of the frank, though I have not, in my present frame of mind, much appetite for exertion in writing. My nerves are in a **** state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to ***! I'll fight it out and be off with it.

H 2

man of apparent worth. On New-
I gave him the following prolo-
spouted to his audience with appl
I can no more.—If once I was cl
farm, I should respire more at can

LXXII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP

Edinburgh, 25

It has been owing to unremitting
that I have not written to you, I
now. My health is greatly better,
once more to share in satisfactio
with the rest of my fellow-creatur

Many thanks, my much esteec
your kind letters; but why will y
the risk of being contemptible and
own eyes? When I pique myself
dent spirit, I hope it is neither p

in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.

Falconer, the unfortunate author of the *Shipwreck*, which you so much admire, is no more. After witnessing the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the Aurora frigate! I forget what part of Scotland had the honour of giving him birth, but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune. He was one of those daring adventurous spirits which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think, as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish ballad, which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart :

“ Little did my mother think,
That day she cradled me,
What land I was to travel in,
Or what death I should die.”

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine ; and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish :

My blankets were my witness
The clocks and the worms my bedfellows
And O see sound as I should sleep!

I do not remember in all my reading with any thing more truly the language than the exclamation in the last line. A love; to speak its language truly, they have felt it.

I am every day expecting the doctor little godson * the small-pox. They are in country, and I tremble for his fate. I cannot help congratulating you on his spirit. Every person who sees him : him to be the finest, handsomest child seen. I am myself delighted with the of his little chest, and a certain miniat the carriage of his head, and the glass black eye, which promise the undaunted of an independent mind.

I thought to have sent you some time ago. I promise you poetry

LXXIII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 13th February, 1790.

BEG your pardon, my dear and much-valued
 friend, for writing to you on this very unfashion-
 , unsightly sheet—

“ My poverty but not my will consents.”

not to make amends, since of modish post I have
 none, except one poor widowed half-sheet of gilt
 which lies in my drawer among my plebeian fools-
 pages, like the widow of a man of fashion,
 married that unpolite scoundrel, Necessity, has dri-
 ven from Burgundy and Pine-apple to a dish of
 pea-soup, with the scandal-bearing help-mate of a
 ge-priest; or a glass of whisky-toddy, with
 a ruby-nosed yoke-fellow of a foot-padding ex-
 anan—I make a vow to enclose this sheet-full
 of pistolary fragments in that my only scrap of
 paper.

I am indeed your unworthy debtor for three
 idle letters. I ought to have written to you long
 ago, but it is a literal fact, I have scarcely a
 moment. It is not that I *will not* write to
 you; Miss Burnet is not more dear to her guardian
 uncle, nor his grace the duke of * * * * to the
 ears of * * * * than my friend Cunningham
 is to me. It is not that I *cannot* write to you: should
 I doubt it, take the following fragment which
 I intended for you some time ago, and be con-

vinced that I can *antithesize* sentiment, and *circum-volute* periods, as well as any coiner of phrase in the regions of philology.

December, 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

WHERE are you? And what are you doing? Can you be that son of levity who takes up a friendship as he takes up a fashion; or are you, like some other of the worthiest fellows in the world, the victim of indolence, laden with fetters of ever-increasing weight?

What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion of conscious existence, equally capable of enjoying pleasure, happiness, and rapture, or of suffering pain, wretchedness, and misery, it is surely worthy of an inquiry, whether there be not such a thing as a science of life; whether method, economy, and fertility of expedients, be not applicable to enjoyment; and whether there be not a want of dexterity in pleasure, which renders our little scantling of happiness still less; and a profuseness and intoxication in bliss, which leads to satiety, disgust, and self-abhorrence. There is not a doubt but that health, talents, character, decent competency, respectable friends; are real substantial blessings; and yet do we not daily see those who enjoy many or all of these good things, contrive, notwithstanding, to be as unhappy as others to whose lot few of them have fallen; I believe one great source of this mistake or misconduct is owing to a certain stimulus, with us called ambition, which goads us up the hill of life, not as we ascend other eminences, for the laudable curiosity of view.

extended landscape, but rather for the dis-
pride of looking down on others of our
creatures, seemingly diminutive in humbler
s, &c. &c.

Sunday, 14th February, 1790.

help me! I am now obliged to join

“ Night to day, and Sunday to the week.”

There be any truth in the orthodox faith of these
ages, I am * * * * past redemption, and what
is, * * * * to all eternity. I am deeply read
Johnson's Four-fold State, Marshal on Sanctifica-
Wuthrie's Trial of a Saving Interest, &c.; but
there is no balm in Gilead, there is no physician
for me; so I shall e'en turn Arminian, and
do “ sincere though imperfect obedience.”

Tuesday, 16th.

Truly for me I was prevented from the discus-
sion of the knotty point at which I had just made a
step. All my fears and cares are of this world:
there is another, an honest man has nothing to
do with it. I hate a man that wishes to be a
deist, but, I fear every fair unprejudiced inquirer
in some degree be a sceptic. It is not that
there are any very staggering arguments against
immortality of man; but, like electricity,
light, &c. the subject is so involved in dark-
ness that we want data to go upon. One thing
convinces me much: that we are to live for ever,
too good news to be true. That we are to en-
joy a new scene of existence, where, exempt

from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends without satiety or separation—how much should I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain!

* * * * *

My time is once more expired. I will write to Mr. Cleghorn soon. God bless him and all his concerns! And may all the powers that preside over conviviality and friendship be present with all their kindest influence, when the bearer of this, Mr. Syme, and you meet! I wish I could also make one. I think we should be * * *

Finally, brethren, farewell! Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gentle, whatsoever things are charitable, whatsoever things are kind, think on these things, and think on

ROBERT BURNS.

LXXIV.

TO MR. HILL.

Ellisland, 2d March, 1790.

AT a late meeting of the Monkland Friend Society, it was resolved to augment their library by the following books, which you are to send us as soon as possible: *The Mirror, the Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World* (these, for my own sake, I wish to have by the first carrier), *Knox's History of the Reformation; Ray's History of the Rebellion in 1715; any good History of the Rebellion in 1745; A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony*, by Mr.

Gibb ; *Hervey's Meditations* ; *Beveridge's Thoughts* ; and another copy of *Watson's Body of Divinity*.

I wrote to Mr. A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and lately I wrote to you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one nor other of you.

In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much, *An Index to the Excise Laws, or an Abridgment of all the Statutes now in force relative to the Excise*, by Jellinger Symons ; I want three copies of this book : if it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants, too, *A Family Bible*, the larger the better, but second-handed, for he does not choose to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or cheap, copies of *Otway's Dramatic Works*, *Ben Jonson's*, *Dryden's*, *Congreve's*, *Wycherley's*, *Vanburgh's*, *Cibber's* ; or any *Dramatic Works* of the more modern, *Macklin*, *Garrick*, *Foote*, *Colman*, or *Sheridan*. A good copy, too, of *Moliere*, in French, I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also ; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have *Racine*, *Corneille*, and *Voltaire* too. I am in no hurry for all, or any of these ; but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend ? and how is Mrs. Hill ? I trust, if now and then not so *elegantly* handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever.

My good wife, too, has a charming "wood-note wild;" now could we four —

* * * * *

I am out of all patience with this vile world for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures: except in a few scoundrelly instances, I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have, is born with us; but we are placed here amid so much nakedness, and hunger, and poverty, and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness, in order that we may EXIST! Still there are, in every age, a few souls, that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Adieu!

LXXV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 10th April, 1790.

I HAVE just now, my ever-honoured friend, enjoyed a very high luxury, in reading a paper of the *Lounger*. You know my national prejudices. I had often read and admired the *Spectator*, *Adven-*

turer, Rambler, and World; but still with a certain regret, that they were so thoroughly and entirely English. Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my country reaps from the union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence, and even her very name? I often repeat that couplet of my favourite poet, Goldsmith—

“—— states of native liberty possess'd,
Though very poor, may yet be very bless'd.”

Nothing can reconcile me to the common terms, “English ambassador, English court,” &c. And I am out of all patience to see that equivocal character, Hastings, impeached by “the Commons of England.” Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe in my conscience such ideas as, “my country; her independence; her honour; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land;” &c. I believe these, among your *men of the world*, men who in fact guide for the most part and govern our world, are looked on as so many modifications of wrong-headedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms, to rouse or lead THE RABBLE; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong, they only mean proper and improper, and their measure of conduct is, not what they OUGHT, but what they DARE. For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men, and himself one of the ablest men that ever lived—the celebrated

earl of Chesterfield. In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interests, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, the *perfect man*; a man to lead nations. But a great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the staunch opinion of *men of the world*; but I call on honour, virtue and worth, to give the Stygian doctrine a loud negative! However, this must be allowed, that, you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, *then* the true measure of human conduct is *proper* and *improper*. Virtue and vice as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, scarcely the same import and value to the world large, as harmony and discord in the modification of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstasy unknown to the coarse organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings and inharmonic jars, in this ill-tuned system of being, it is odds but the individual would be happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of society, as it would stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

You must know I have just met with the *M* and *Lounger* for the first time, and I am quite raptures with them; I should be glad to have your opinion of some of the papers. The one I have read, *Lounger*, No. 61, has cost me more tears than any thing I have read of, a long time. M'Kenzie has been called the Addison of the

and, in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison's exquisite humour, he as certainly outdoes him in the tender and the pathetic. His *Man of Feeling* (but I am not counsel learned in the laws of criticism), I estimate as the first performance in its kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence; in short, more of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others—than from the simple affecting tale of poor Harley?

Still, with all my admiration of M'Kenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, madam, that among the few favoured of Heaven in the structure of their minds (for such there certainly are), there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree, absolutely disqualifying for the truly important business of making a man's way into life. If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend, A * * * * *, is very much under these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude; for I, a common acquaintance, or, as my vanity will have it, an humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy, or peculiarly miserable!

I have been manufacturing some verses lately; but as I have got the most hurried season of excise-business over, I hope to have more leisure to tran-

scribe any thing that may show how
the honour to be, Madam,

Yours, &

LXXVI.

TO DR. MOORE.

Dumfries, Excise-office, 14th .

SIR,

COMING into town this morning, to at-
tend in this office, it being collection-day, I
met a gentleman who tells me he is on his way
to London; so I take the opportunity of writing
this letter as franking is at present under a tempo-
rary suspension. I shall have some snatches of leisure to-
day, amidst our horrid business and bustle, and
I shall improve them as well as I can; my
letter be as stupid as * * * * *
as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as
a grace-before-meat, or as long as a law
case; as ill-spelt as country Jargon,
as Douglas's cause; as ill-spelt as country Jargon,
as ill-spelt as country Jargon, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty
Ker's answer to it—I hope, considering the
circumstances, you will forgive it; and, as it costs
me to no expense of postage, I shall have
nothing to reflect about it.

I am sadly ungrateful in not returning
thanks for your most valuable present, and in
fact, you are in some degree blameable
for it. You were pleased to express an
opinion of the work, which so flatters me
that nothing less would serve my overwe-

than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollet, in your different qualities and merits as novel-writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear; but I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shows in the Book of Job—“And I said, I will also declare my opinion.” I have quite disfigured my copy of the book with my annotations. I never take it up without at the same time taking my pencil, and marking with asterisms, parentheses, &c., wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkably well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision.

Though I shall hardly think of fairly writing out my “Comparative View,” I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks, such as they are.

I have just received from my gentleman, that horrid summons in the book of Revelations—“That time shall be no more!”

The little collection of sonnets have some charming poetry in them. If *indeed* I am indebted to the fair author for the book, and not, as I rather suspect, to a celebrated author of the other sex, I should certainly have written to the lady, with my grateful acknowledgments, and my own ideas of the comparative excellence of her pieces. I would do this last, not from any vanity of thinking that my remarks could be of much consequence to Mrs. Smith, but merely from my own feelings as an author, doing as I would be done by.

DEAR MADAM,

AFTER a long day's toil, plague, and care to write to you. Ask me not why I have so long? It was owing to hurry, and fifty other things; in short, to any thing getfulness of *la plus aimable de son ses* bye, you are indebted your best courtes this last compliment, as I pay it from conviction of its truth—a quality ratl compliments of these grinning, bowin times.

Well, I hope writing to *you* will ease troubled soul. So rely has it been bruil A ci-devant friend of mine, and an in quaintance of yours, has given my feelin that I perceive will gangrene danger cure. He has wounded my pride!

* * * * *

LXXVIII.

TO, MR. CUNNINGHAM.

WILLIAMSON

try grannum at a family christening; a bride on the market-day before her marriage; * * * *
 * * * * *; a tavern-keeper at an election-dinner; &c. &c.—but the resemblance that hits my fancy best, is that blackguard miscreant, Satan, who roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, *searching* whom he may devour. However, tossed about as I am, if I choose (and who would not choose) to bind down with the crampets of attention the brazen foundation of integrity, I may rear up the superstructure of Independence, and, from its daring turrets, bid defiance to the storms of fate. And is not this a “consummation devoutly to be wished?”

“Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;
 Lord of the lion-heart, and eagle-eye!
 Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
 Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky!” -

Are not these noble verses? They are the introduction of *Smollet's Ode to Independence*; if you have not seen the poem, I will send it to you. How wretched is the man that hangs on by the favours of the great! To shrink from every dignity of man, at the approach of a lordly piece of self-consequence, who, amid all his tinsel glitter and stately hauteur, is but a creature, formed as thou art—and perhaps not so well formed as thou art—came into the world a puling infant as thou didst, and must go out of it, as all men must, a naked corse.*

* The preceding letter explains the feelings under which this was written. The strain of indignant invective goes on some time longer in the style which our Bard was too apt to indulge, and of which the reader has already seen so much.

LXXIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

November, 1790.

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”

Fate has long owed me a letter of good news from you, in return for the many tidings of sorrow which I have received. In this instance I most cordially obey the apostle — “Rejoice with them that do rejoice,” — for me, *to sing* for joy, is no new thing; but *to preach* for joy, as I have done in the commencement of this epistle, is a pitch of extravagant rapture to which I never rose before.

I read your letter — I literally jumped for joy — How could such a mercurial creature as a poet lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend? I seized my gilt-headed Wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and rapture; and stride, stride — quick and quicker — out skipped I among the broomy banks of Nith, to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs. Little's is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment, to the sweet little fellow, than I, extempore almost, poured out to him in the following verses.*

I am much flattered by your approbation of my *Tam o' Shanter*, which you express in your former letter; though, by the bye, you load me in that said

* See the poem, — On the Birth of a Posthumous Child.

letter with accusations heavy and many; to all which I plead, *not guilty!* Your book is, I hear, on the road to reach me. As to printing of poetry, when you prepare it for the press, you have only to spell it right, and place the capital letters properly: as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves.

I have a copy of *Tam o' Shanter* ready to send you by the first opportunity: it is too heavy to send by post.

I heard of Mr. Corbet lately. He, in consequence of your recommendation, is most zealous to serve me. Please favour me soon with an account of your good folks; if Mrs. H. is recovering, and the young gentleman doing well.

LXXX.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Edinburgh, 23d January, 1791.

MANY happy returns of the season to you, my dear friend! As many of the good things of this life as is consistent with the usual mixture of good and evil in the cup of being!

I have just finished a poem, which you will receive enclosed. It is my first essay in the way of tales.

I have these several months been hammering at an elegy on the amiable and accomplished Miss Burnet. I have got, and can get no farther than the following fragment, on which please give me your strictures. In all kinds of poetic composition set great store by your opinion; but in sentimental

“ Life ne'er exulted in so rich a pri

Let me hear from you soon. Adie

LXXXI.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

17th:

TAKE these two guineas, and pla
against that ***** account of your
gagged my mouth these five or six m
as little write good things as apologie
owe money to. O the supreme cu
three guineas do the business of five
labours of Hercules; not all the H
centuries of Egyptian bondage, wer
superable business, such an * * * * *
Poverty! thou half-sister of death,
german of hell! where shall I find fo
tion equal to the amplitude of thy de
pressed by thee, the venerable ancient
in the practice of every virtue, laden
wretchedness. implores a little—lit

glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes in bitterness of soul under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see in suffering silence his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of folly and vice, though in common with thee the offspring of evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education, is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies as usual bring him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country. But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early follies and extravagance are spirit and fire; *his* consequent wants are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a ***** and a lord.—Nay, worst of all, alas, for helpless woman! the needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot wheels of

but excretion is to the
the body: the vital sluices of ~~both~~ are
relieved by their respective evacuations.

LXXXII.

TO A. F. TYTLER, ESQ.

SIR,

NOTHING less than the unfortunate accident met with could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments for your letter. His own favour and that an essay in a walk of the muse new to him, where consequently his hopes were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt; to have that poem so much approved by one of the first judges, was the most gratifying vibration that ever trilled along the heart of a poor poet. However, Providence, in the proper proportion of evil with the good, it seems is necessary in this sublunary state to be proper to check my exultation by a very sudden reverse of fortune. A day or two after I received my horse came down with me and brought me to the ground. As this is the first service my

ey are truly there : one of them, the hit at
er and priest, I shall cut out : as to the fall-
n the catastrophe, for the reason you justly
it cannot easily be remedied. Your appro-
air, has given me such additional spirits to
e in this species of poetic composition,
m already revolving two or three stories in
y. If I can bring these floating ideas to
kind of embodied form, it will give me an
al opportunity of assuring you how much I
: honour to be, &c.

LXXXIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 7th Feb. 1791.

tell you, madam, that by a fall, not from
e, but with my horse, I have been a cripple
ne, and that this is the first day my arm and
ve been able to serve me in writing, you
ow that it is too good an apology for my
ly ungrateful silence. I am now getting bet-
am able to rhyme a little, which implies
derable ease; as I cannot think that the
etic genius is able to compose on the rack.
ot remember if ever I mentioned to you my
an idea of composing an elegy on the late
urnet of Monboddo. I had the honour of
etty well acquainted with her, and have sel-
t so much at the loss of an acquaintance, as
heard that so amiable and accomplished a
God's works was no more. I have as yet
farther than the following fragment, of

which please let me have your opinion. You know that elegy is a subject so much exhausted, that any new idea on the business is not to be expected; 'tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light. How far I have succeeded as to this last, you will judge from what follows—

(Here follows the Elegy, adding this verse)

The parent's heart that nestled fond in thee,
That heart how sunk, a prey to grief and care:
So deck'd the woodbine sweet yon aged tree,
So from it ravish'd, leaves it bleak and bare.

I have proceeded no further.

Your kind letter, with your kind *remembrance* of your godson, came safe. This last, madam, is scarcely what my pride can bear. As to the little fellow, he is, partiality apart, the finest boy I have of a long time seen. He is now seventeen months' old, has the small-pox and measles over, has cut several teeth, and yet never had a grain of doctor's drugs in his bowels.

I am truly happy to hear that the "little floweret" is blooming so fresh and fair, and that the "mother-plant" is rather recovering her drooping head. Soon and well may her "cruel wounds" be healed! I have written thus far with a good deal of difficulty. When I get a little abler, you shall hear farther from,

Madam, yours, &c.

LXXXIV.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.

*wedging a present of a valuable Snuff-box,
and a fine picture of MARY, Queen of SCOTS, on
Lid.*

LADY,
 NOTHING less than the unlucky accident of having
 broken my right arm, could have prevented
 the moment I received your ladyship's elegant
 gift by Mrs. Miller, from returning you my
 best and most grateful acknowledgments. In
 your ladyship I shall set it apart: the sym-
 bol of religion shall only be more sacred. In the
 point of poetic composition, the box shall be my
 guiding genius. When I would breathe the com-
 passive wish of benevolence for the happiness of
 the world, I shall recollect your ladyship: when I would
 stir my fancy in the distresses incident to hu-
 manity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary.

LXXXV.

TO MRS. GRAHAM, OF FINTRY.

DAM,
 WHETHER it is that the story of our Mary, Queen
 of Scots, has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a
 poet, or whether I have in the enclosed ballad suc-
 ceeded beyond my usual poetic success, I know not;
 but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my muse

for a good while past ; on that account I enclose it particularly to you. It is true, the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already deeply indebted to Mr. G——'s goodness ; and what, *in the usual ways of men*, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr. G. can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come. I was born a poor dog ; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor ; but I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty ; and, without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm, that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter shall ever make me do any thing injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings, for failings are a part of human nature, may they ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind ! It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence ; nor is it Mr. G——'s chiefest praise that he can command influence ; but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman ; and I trust it shall be mine to receive with thankfulness, and remember with undiminished gratitude.

LXXXVI.

TO THE REV. G. BAIRD.

WHY did you, my dear sir, write to me in such a hesitating style, on the business of poor Bruce ? Don't I know, and have I not felt the many ills, the peculiar ills, that poetic flesh is heir to ? You

shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; and had your letter had my direction so as to have reached me sooner (it only came to my hand this moment) I should have directly put you out of suspense on the subject. I only ask that some prefatory advertisement in the book, as well as the subscription-bills, may bear, that the publication is solely for the benefit of Bruce's mother. I would not put it in the power of ignorance to surmise, or malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. I have such a host of peccadilloes, failings, follies, and backslidings (any body but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation), that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection.

* * * * *

LXXXVII.

TO DR. MOORE.

Ellisland, 28th February, 1791.

I do not know, sir, whether you are a subscriber to *Grose's Antiquities of Scotland*. If you are, the enclosed poem will not be altogether new to you. Captain Grose did me the favour to send me a dozen copies of the proof-sheet, of which this is one. Should you have read the piece before, still this will answer the principal end I have in view; it will give

me another opportunity of thanking you for all your goodness to the rustic bard; and also of showing you, that the abilities you have been pleased to commend and patronise, are still employed in the way you wish.

The *Elegy on Captain Henderson* is a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much. Poets have in this the same advantage as Roman Catholics; they can be of service to their friends after they have past that bourn where all other kindness ceases to be of any avail. Whether, after all, either the one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical: but I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living: and, as a very orthodox text, I forget where in Scripture, says, "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;" so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea, that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly beloved friend, or still more dearly beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

The ballad on Queen Mary was begun while I was busy with *Percy's Reliques of English Poetry*. By the way, how much is every honest heart, which has a tincture of Caledonian prejudice, obliged to you for your glorious story of Buchanan and Targe! 'Twas an unequivocal proof of your loyal gallantry of soul, giving Targe the victory. I should have been mortified to the ground if you had not.



I have just read over once more of many times, your *Zeluco*. I marked with my pencil, as I went along, every passage that pleased me particularly above the rest; and one, or two I think, which with humble deference, I am disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province, beyond any other novelist I have ever perused. Richardson indeed might perhaps be excepted; but, unhappily, his *dramatis personæ* are beings of some other world; and however they may captivate the inexperienced romantic fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our riper minds.

As to my private concerns, I am going on, a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the list of excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority. I have had an immense loss in the death of the earl of Glencairn, the patron from whom all my fame and good fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence: so soon as the prince's friends had got in (and every dog, you know, has his day), my getting forward in the excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be. Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and

as to my boys, poor little fellows ! if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life as I could wish, I shall, if I am favoured so much of the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors, this is one of the best, *Better be the head o' the commonalty, as the tale o' the gentry.*

But I am got on a subject, which, however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give you a short poem on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honour to be yours, &c.

* * * * *

Written on the blank leaf of a book which I presented to a very young lady whom I had formerly characterised under the denomination of *The Rosebud.*

LXXXVIII.

TO THE REV. ARCH. ALISON.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 14th Feb. 1791.

SIR,

You must, by this time, have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man, and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it. The fact is, you yourself are to blame

for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up, forsooth, a deep-learned digest of strictures, on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles. I own, sir, that, at first glance, several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime, than the twingle twangle of a jews-harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all association of ideas;—these I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith.—In short, sir, except *Euclid's Elements of Geometry*, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fire-side, in the winter evenings of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas as your "*Essays on the Principles of Taste.*" One thing, sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit in the work, I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style, sounds something like a contradiction in terms; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

I enclose you some poetic bagatelles of my late composition. The one in print is my first essay in the way of telling a tale.

I am, sir, &c.

LXXXIX.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

12th March, 1791.

If the foregoing piece be worth your strictures, let me have them. For my own part, a thing that I have just composed always appears through a double portion of that partial medium in which an author will ever view his own works. I believe, in general, novelty has something in it that inebriates the fancy, and not unfrequently dissipates and fumes away like other intoxication, and leaves the poor patient, as usual, with an aching heart. A striking instance of this might be adduced in the revolution of many a hymeneal honey-moon. But, lest I sink into stupid prose, and so sacrilegiously intrude on the office of my parish priest, I shall fill up the page in my own way, and give you another song of my late composition, which will appear, perhaps, in Johnson's work, as well as the former.

You must know a beautiful Jacobite air, *There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame*. When political combustion ceases to be the object of princes and patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of historians and poets.

"By yon castle wa' at the close of the day." &c.

See *Songs*.

If you like the air, and if the stanzas hit your fancy, you cannot imagine, my dear friend, how much you will oblige me, if, by the charms of your delightful voice, you would give my honest effusion to "the memory of joys that are past!" to the few friends whom you indulge in that pleasure. But I have scribbled on till I hear the clock has intimated the near approach of

"That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane."

So, good night to you! Sound be your sleep, and delectable your dreams! — A-propos, how do you like this thought in a ballad I have just now on the tapis?

I look to the west when I gae to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;
For far in the west is he I lo'e best,
The lad that is dear to my babie and me!

Good night, once more, and God bless you!



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END OF THE FIRST VOLUME

THE
LETTERS
OF
ROBERT BURNS,
CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED
FROM
DR. CURRIE'S COLLECTION.

VOL. II.

MDCCCXIX.

**Printed by T. DAVISON,
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THE
LETTERS
OF
ROBERT BURNS.
VOL. II.



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LETTERS
OF
ROBERT BURNS.

XC.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 11th April, 1791.

Once more able, my honoured friend, to re-
you, with my own hand, thanks for the many
nces of your friendship, and particularly for
kind anxiety in this last disaster that my evil
us had in store for me. However, life is che-
ed—joy and sorrow—for on Saturday morn-
ast, Mrs. Burns made me a present of a fine
rather stouter, but not so handsome as your
on was at his time of life. Indeed I look on
little namesake to be my *chef d'œuvre* in
species of manufacture, as I look on *Tam o'
ster* to be my standard performance in the
ical line. 'Tis true both the one and the other
ver a spice of roguish waggery that might,
aps, be as well spared: but then they also

show, in my opinion, a force of génius, and a finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs. Burns is getting stout again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast, as a reaper from the corn-ridge. That is the peculiar privilege and blessing of our hale sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather*. We cannot hope for that highly polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the famous cestus of Venus. It is, indeed, such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven, I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such a humble one as mine; we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence—as fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty, and unsullied purity; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspecting of, because unacquainted with, the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return: these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution,

which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made. Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur* comes on with his small-pox. May Almighty goodness preserve and restore him!

XCI.

TO

DEAR SIR,

I AM exceedingly to blame in not writing you long ago; but the truth is, that I am the most indolent of all human beings; and when I matriculate in the herald's office, I intend that my supporters shall be two sloths, my crest a slow-worm, and the motto, "Deil tak the foremost!" So much by way of apology for not thanking you sooner for your kind execution of my commission.

I would have sent you the poem: but somehow or other it found its way into the public papers, where you must have seen it.

* * * * *

I am ever, dear sir, yours sincerely,

ROBERT BURNS.

XCII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

11th June, 1791.

LET me interest you, my dear Cunningham, in behalf of the gentleman who waits on you with this. He is a Mr. Clarke, of Moffat, principal school-master there, and is at present suffering severely under the * * * of one or two powerful individuals of his employers. He is accused of harshness to * * * that were placed under his care. God help the teacher, if a man of sensibility and genius, and such is my friend Clarke, when a booby father presents him with his booby son, and insists on lighting up the rays of science in a fellow's head whose skull is impervious and inaccessible by any other way than a positive fracture with a cudgel: a fellow whom, in fact, it savours of impiety to attempt making a scholar of, as he has been marked a blockhead in the book of fate, at the almighty fiat of his Creator.

The patrons of Moffat-school are the ministers, magistrates, and town-council of Edinburgh; and as the business comes now before them, let me beg my dearest friend to do every thing in his power to serve the interests of a man of genius and worth, and a man whom I particularly respect and esteem. You know some good fellows among the magistracy and council, * * * * * but particularly you have much to say with a reverend gentleman, to whom you have the

of being very nearly related, and whom this
and age have had the honour to produce.

not name the historian of Charles V.* I
n, through the medium of his nephew's in-
, that Mr. Clarke is a gentleman who will
grace even his patronage. I know the merits
cause thoroughly, and say it, that my friend
ng a sacrifice to prejudiced ignorance, and
. God help the children of dependence!
and persecuted by their enemies, and too
alas! almost unexceptionably, received by
riends with disrespect and reproach, under
n disguise of cold civility and humiliating

O! to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the
of his independence, amid the solitary
of his deserts; rather than in civilized life,
sly to tremble for a subsistence, precarious as
price of a fellow-creature! Every man has
ues, and no man is without his failings; and
n that privileged plain-dealing of friendship,
in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach
he helping hand, without at the same time
g out those failings, and apportioning them
hare in procuring my present distress. My
, for such the world calls ye, and such ye
yourselves to be, pass by my virtues if you
but do, also, spare my follies: the first will
in my breast for themselves, and the last
e pain enough to the ingenuous mind without
And since deviating more or less from the
of propriety and rectitude must be incident

Dr. Robertson was uncle to Mr. Cunningham.

to human nature, do thou, Fortune, put it in my power, always from myself, and of myself, to bear the consequences of those errors! I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning.

To return, in this rambling letter, to the subject I set out with, let me recommend my friend, Mr. Clarke, to your acquaintance and good offices; his worth entitles him to the one, and his gratitude will merit the other. I long much to hear from you. Adieu!

XCIII.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

MY LORD,
LANGUAGE sinks under the ardour of my feelings when I would thank your lordship for the honour you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson. In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honour to write to me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence, in the very middle of my harvest, is what I much doubt I dare not venture on.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion: but who could write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired.—I got, indeed, to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard, on

crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them, which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how unequal I am to the task. However, it affords me an opportunity of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honour to be, &c.



XCIV.

TO LADY E. CUNNINGHAM.

MY LADY,

I WOULD, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you any thing I compose in my poetical way; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honour of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardour of my heart, the enclosed had been much more worthy your perusal: as it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet. As all the world knows my obligations to the late earl of Glencairn, I would wish to show as openly that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honour to wear to his lordship's memory, were not the "mockery of woe." Nor shall my gratitude perish with me!—If, among

my children, I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand it down to his child as a family honour, and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn!

I was about to say, my lady, that if you think the poem may venture to see the light, I would, in some way or other, give it to the world.*

XCV.

TO MR. AINSLIE.

MY DEAR AINSLIE,

CAN you minister to a mind diseased? Can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, head-ache, nausea, and all the rest of the d—d hounds of hell, that beset a poor wretch who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness—can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

Miserable perdu that I am! I have tried every thing that used to amuse me, but in vain: here must I sit, a monument of the vengeance laid up in store for the wicked, slowly counting every chink of the clock as it slowly—slowly, numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours, who, d—n them, are ranked up before me, every one at his neighbour's backside, and every one with a burden of anguish on his back, to pour on my devoted head—and there is none to pity me. My wife scolds me! my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in

* The Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn.—See *Poems*.

the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow.—When I tell you even * * * has lost its power to please, you will guess something of my hell within, and all around me.—I began *Elibanks* and *Elibraes*, but the stanzas fell unenjoyed and unfinished from my listless tongue; at last I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours that lay by me in my book-case, and I felt something, for the first time since I opened my eyes, of pleasurable existence.—Well—I begin to breathe a little, since I began to write you. How are you? and what are you doing? How goes law? A-propos, for connexion's sake, do not address to me supervisor, for that is an honour I cannot pretend to—I am on the list, as we call it, for a supervisor, and will be called out by and by to act as one; but at present I am a simple gauger, tho' t'other day I got an appointment to an excise division of 25*l. per ann.* better than the rest. My present income, down money, is 70*l. per ann.*

* * * * *

I have one or two good fellows here whom you would be glad to know.

* * * * *

XCVI.

TO MISS DAVIES.

It is impossible, madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind can have any idea of that moral disease under which I un-

happily must rank as the chief of sinners ; I mean a torpitude of the moral powers, that may be called a lethargy of conscience.—In vain Remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes : beneath the deadly fixed eye and leaden hand of Indolence, their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat, slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall. Nothing less, madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss D***'s fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes ; that to make her the subject of a silly ballad, is downright mockery of these ardent feelings ; 'tis like an impertinent jest to a dying friend.

Gracious Heaven ! why this disparity between our wishes and our powers ? Why is the most generous wish to make others blest, impotent and ineffectual—as the idle breeze that crosses the pathless desert ? In my walks of life I have met with a few people to whom how gladly would I have said—“ Go, be happy ! I know that your hearts have been wounded by the scorn of the proud, whom accident has placed above you—or worse still, in whose hands are, perhaps, placed many of the comforts of your life. But there ! ascend that rock, Independence, and look justly down on their littleness of soul. Make the worthless tremble under your indignation, and the foolish sink before your contempt ; and largely impart that happiness to others, which, I am certain, will give yourselves so much pleasure to bestow.”

Why, dear madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love?—Out upon the world! say I, that its affairs are administered so ill! They talk of reform;—good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sons, and even the daughters of men!—Down, immediately, should go fools from the high places where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever haunted by their native insignificance, as the body marches accompanied by its shadow.—As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a loss what to do with them:—had I a world, there should not be a knave in it.

• • • • •

But the hand that could give, I would liberally fill; and I would pour delight on the heart that could kindly forgive and generously love.

Still, the inequalities of life are, among men, comparatively tolerable—but there is a delicacy, a tenderness, accompanying every view in which we can place lovely Woman, that are grated and shocked at the rude, capricious distinctions of fortune. Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them—but let them be ALL sacred.—Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable; it is an original component feature of my mind.

XCVII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 17th December, 1791.

MANY thanks to you, madam, for your good news respecting the little floweret and the mother-plant. I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and then Mrs. Henri will find her little darling the representative of his late parent, in every thing but his abridged existence.

I have just finished the following song, which, to a lady the descendant of Wallace, and many heroes of his truly illustrious line, and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology.

“Farewell thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies.”
See *Songs*.

The circumstance that gave rise to the foregoing verses, was looking over, with a musical friend, M'Donald's collection of Highland airs, I was struck with one, an Isle of Skye tune, entitled *Oran an Aoig*, or *The Song of Death*, to the measure of which I have adapted my stanzas. I have of late composed two or three other little pieces, which, ere yon full-orbed moon, whose broad impudent face now stares at old mother earth all night, shall

have shrunk into a modest crescent, just peeping forth at dewy dawn, I shall find an hour to transcribe for you. *A Dieu je vous commende !*

XCVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

5th January, 1792.

You see my hurried life, madam ; I can only command starts of time : however, I am glad of one thing ; since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with commissioner Graham, for the board had made me the subject of their animadversions ; and now I have the pleasure of informing you, that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to — but hold ! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a swearing in this.

Alas ! how little do the wantonly or idly officious think what mischief they do by their malicious insinuations, indirect impertinence, or thoughtless blabbings ! What a difference there is in intrinsic worth, candour, benevolence, generosity, kindness — in all the charities and all the virtues, between one class of human beings and another ! For instance, the amiable circle I so lately mixed with in the hospitable hall of D * * *, their generous hearts — their uncontaminated dignified minds — their informed and polished understandings — what a con-

trast, when compared—if such comparing were not downright sacrilege—with the soul of the miscreant who can deliberately plot the destruction of an honest man that never offended him, and with a grin of satisfaction see the unfortunate being, his faithful wife and prattling innocents, turned over to beggary and ruin!

Your cup, my dear madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I, with great formality, produced my whig-meleerie cup, and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of sir William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm, that they insisted on bumpering the punch round in it; and, by and by, never did your great ancestor lay a *Suthron* more completely to rest, than for a time did your cup my two friends. A-propos! this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend! and bless me, the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours wherever they are scattered over the earth!

XCIX.

TO MR. WILLIAM SMELLIE, PRINTER.

Dumfries, 22d January, 1792.

I sit down, my dear sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first rank of fashion, too. What a task! to you—who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies, than you do for

the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the groupings and combinations of fashion, as an idiot painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the foreground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades. Mrs. Riddel, who will take this letter to town with her, and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady too is a votary of the muses; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the *lady-poetesses* of the day. She is a great admirer of your book; and, hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her first visit to our Caledonian capital. I told her that her best way was, to desire her near relation, and your intimate friend, Craighdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I should take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing: a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it; and a failing that you will as easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself;—where she dislikes or despises, she is apt to make no more a secret of it, than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning *com-*

pliments of the season, but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that FORTUNE may never throw your SUBSISTENCE to the mercy of a knave, or set your CHARACTER on the judgment of a FOOL; but that, upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say, 'Here lies a man who did honour to science!' and men of worth shall say, 'Here lies a man who did honour to human nature!'

C.

TO MR. W. NICOL.

20th February, 1792.

O THOU, wisest among the wise, meridian blaze of prudence, full moon of discretion, and chief of many counsellors! How infinitely is thy puddled-headed, rattled-headed, wrong-headed, round-headed slave indebted to thy supereminent goodness, that from the luminous path of thy own right-lined rectitude, thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the zig-zag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions: May one feeble ray of that light of wisdom which darts from thy sensorium, straight as the arrow of heaven, and bright as the meteor of inspiration, may it be my portion, so that I may be less unworthy of the face and favour of that father of proverbs and master of maxims, that antipode of folly, and magnet among the sages, the wise and witty Willie Nicol! Amen! Amen! Yea, so be it!

For me! I am a beast, a reptile, and know nothing! From the cave of my ignorance, amid the mists of my dulness, and pestilential fumes of my political heresies, I look up to thee, as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon, to the cloudless glory of a summer sun! sorely sighing in bitterness of soul, I say, when shall all my name be the quotation of the wise, and my maintenance be the delight of the godly, like the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills? * As for him, his works are perfect: never did the pen of calumny mar the fair page of his reputation, nor the bolt of hatred fly at his dwelling.

* * * * *

Thou mirror of purity, when shall the elfine lamp illumine my glimmerous understanding, purged from sensual appetites and gross desires, shine like the constellation of thy intellectual powers?—As for thee, thy thoughts are pure, and thy lips are holy. Never did the unhallowed breath of the powers of darkness, and the pleasures of darkness, pollute the sacred flame of thy sky-descended and heaven-sent desires: never did the vapours of impurity dim the unclouded serene of thy cerulean imagination. O that like thine were the tenor of my life! like thine the tenor of my conversation! then should my friend fear for my strength, no enemy rejoice in my weakness! then should I lie down and rise up, and none to make me afraid.—May thy pity and thy prayer be exercised for, O thou lamp of wisdom and mirror of morality! thy devoted slave. †

* Mr. Nicol.

† This strain of irony was excited by a letter of Mr. Nicol, containing good advice.

SINCE I wrote to you the last time I have not had time to write you. I say that I had not time, that, as the three demons, indolence, busyness have so completely shared my hours as not to leave me a five-minutes up a pen in.

Thank heaven, I feel my spirits with the renovating year. Now earnest take up Thomson's songs. I think I have used him unkindly with too much appearance of (Do you know the much-admired called *The Sutor's Tochter*? It is mine of mine, and I have written some of my best songs to it. I will have it sung with great applause in the circles by Major Robertson of L with his corps.



? I do not know that my name is matriculated, the heralds call it, at all: but I have invented one for myself, so you know I shall be chief of the name; and, by courtesy of Scotland, will likewise be entitled to supporters. These, however, I do not intend having on my seal. I am a bit of a herald, and shall give you, *secundum artem*, my arms. A field, azure, a holly bush, seeded, proper, in chief; a shepherd's pipe and crook, saltier-wise, proper, in chief. On a wreath of the colours, a d-lark perching on a sprig of bay-tree, proper, crest. Two mottoes: round the top of the shield, *Wood notes wild*; at the bottom of the shield, in the usual place, *Better a wee bush than nae bield*. The shepherd's pipe and crook I do not mean the nonsense of painters of Arcadia, but a *Stock Horn*, and a *Club*, such as you see at the head of Allan Ramsay, in Allan's quarto edition of the *Shepherd*. By the bye, do you know Allan? He must be a man of very great genius—Why is he not more known?—Has he no patrons? or do poverty's cold wind and crushing rain beat keen heavy' on him? I once, and but once, got a sight of that noble edition of that noblest pastoral in the world; and dear as it was, I mean, dear as to my pocket, I would have bought it, but I was told it was printed and engraved for subscribers only. He is the *only* artist who has hit *genuine* pastoral *costume*. What, my dear Cunningham, is it in riches, that they narrow and harden the heart so? I think, that were I as rich as the sun, I could be as generous as the day; but as I have no reason to imagine my soul a nobler one than any other man's, I must conclude that wealth imparts a

bird-lime quality to the possessor, at which the man, in his native poverty, would have revolted. What has led me to this, is the idea of such merit as Mr. Allan possesses, and such riches as a nabob or government contractor possesses, and why they do not form a mutual league. Let wealth shelter and cherish unprotected merit, and the gratitude and celebrity of that merit will richly repay it.

* * * * *

CII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Annan Water Foot, 22d August, 1792.

Do not blame me for it, Madam—my own conscience, hackneyed and weather-beaten as it is, in watching and reproving my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c. has continued to blame and punish me sufficiently.

* * * * *

Do you think it possible, my dear and honoured friend, that I could be so lost to gratitude for many favours; to esteem for much worth, and to the honest, kind, pleasurable tie of, now old acquaintance, and I hope and am sure of progressive increasing friendship—as, for a single day, not to think of you—to ask the Fates what they are doing and about to do with my much-loved friend and her wide-scattered connexions, and to beg of them to be as kind to you and yours as they possibly can?

A-propos! (though how it is à-propos, I have not leisure to explain.) Do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours? Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the *intermingledoms* of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. Know, then, that the heart-struck awe, the distant humble approach, the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a Messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss L * * B * * *, your neighbour at M * * * *. Mr. B. with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr. H * * * of G * * * *, passing through Dumfries a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honour of calling on me; on which I took my horse (though God knows I could ill spare the time), and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them; and, riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with—

" My bonnie Lizie Bailie,
I'll rowe thee in my plaidie," &c.

So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, " unanointed, unanneal'd;" as Hamlet says.

O saw ye bonnie Lesley, &c.

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet it has ever had this curse, that two or three people, who would be the happier the oftener they meet together, are, almost without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a-year, which, considering the few years of a man's life, is a very great " evil under the sun," which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man. I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave, where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition, that " we meet to part no more !"

• • • • •

" Tell us, ye dead !
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be ?

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the departed sons of men, but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question. " O that

some courteous ghost would blab it out!" but it cannot be; you and I, my friend, must make the experiment by ourselves, and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary, by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I shall take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

So ends this heterogeneous letter, written at this wild place of the world, in the intervals of my labour of discharging a vessel of rum from Antigua.

CIII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Dumfries, 10th Sept. 1792.

No! I will not attempt an apology. Amid all my hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the excise; making ballads, and then drinking, and singing them; and, over and above all, the correcting the press-work of two different publications, still, still I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of my friends and fellow-creatures. I might have done, as I do at present, snatched an hour near "witching time of night," and scrawled a page or two. I might have congratulated my friend on his marriage; or I might have thanked the Caledonian archers for the honour they have done me (though to do myself justice, I intended to have done both in rhyme, else I had done both

long ere now). Well, then, here is to your good health! for you must know I have set a nipperkin of toddy by me, just by way of spell, to keep away the meikled-horned deil, or any of his subaltern imps who may be on their nightly rounds.

But what shall I write to you? "The voice said, Cry!" and I said, "What shall I cry?" O, thou spirit! whatever thou art, or wherèver thou makest thyself visible! be thou a bogle by the eerie side of an auld thorn, in the dreary glen through which the herd callan maun bicker in his gloamin route frae the faulde! Be thou a brownie, set, at dead of night, to thy task by the blazing ingle, or in the solitary barn, where the repercussions of thy iron flail half affright thyself as thou performest the work of twenty of the sons of men, ere the cock-crowing summon thee to thy ample cog of substantial brose! Be thou a kelpie, haunting the ford or ferry, in the starless night, mixing thy laughing yell with the howling of the storm and the roaring of the flood, as thou viewest the perils and miseries of man on the foundering horse, or in the tumbling boat! Or, lastly, be thou a ghost, paying thy nocturnal visits to the hoary ruins of decayed grandeur; or performing thy mystic rites in the shadow of the time-worn church, while the moon looks, without a cloud, on the silent ghastly dwellings of the dead around thee; or taking thy stand by the bedside of the villain, or the murderer, portraying on his dreaming fancy, pictures, dreadful as the horrors of unveiled hell, and terrible as the wrath of incensed Deity! Come, thou spirit! but not in these horrid forms: come with the milder, gentle, easy inspirations which thou breathest round the wig of a

prating advocate, or the tête of a tea-sipping gossip, while their tongues run at the light horse gallop of clish-maclaver for ever and ever—come and assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half an hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark, worth putting pen to paper for.

I feel, I feel the presence of supernatural assistance! circled in the embrace of my elbow-chair, my breast labours like the bloated Sibyl on her three-footed stool, and like her too, labours with Nonsense. Nonsense, auspicious name! Tutor, friend, and finger-post in the mystic mazes of law; the cadaverous paths of physic; and particularly in the sightless soarings of SCHOOL DIVINITY, who, leaving Common Sense confounded at his strength of pinion, Reason, delirious with eyeing his giddy flight; and Truth creeping back into the bottom of her well, cursing the hour that ever she offered her scorned alliance to the wizard power of Theologic Vision—raves abroad on all the winds. “On earth, Discord! a gloomy Heaven above, opening her jealous gates to the nineteen thousandth part of the tithe of mankind! and below, an inescapable and inexorable Hell, expanding its leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals!!!” O doctrine! comfortable and healing to the weary, wounded soul of man! Ye sons and daughters of affliction, ye *pauvres misérables*, to whom day brings no pleasure, and night yields no rest, be comforted. “’Tis but *one* to nineteen hundred thousand that your situation will mend in this world:” so, alas! the experience of the poor and the needy too often

affirms; and, 'tis nineteen hundred thousand to *one* but the dogmas of * * * *, that you will be damned eternally in the world to come!

But of all Nonsense, Religious Nonsense is the most nonsensical; so enough, and more than enough of it. Only, by the bye, will you, or can you tell me, my dear Cunningham, why a sectarian turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illeberalize the heart? They are orderly; they may be just; nay, I have known them merciful; but still your children of sanctity move among their fellow-creatures, with a nostril-snuffing putrescence, and a foot-spurning filth; in short, with a conceited dignity that your titled * * * * *
* * * * * or any other of your Scottish lordlings of seven centuries standing, display when they accidentally mix among the many-aproned sons of mechanical life. I remember, in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or a godly man could be a knave. How ignorant are plough-boys! Nay, I have since discovered that a *godly woman* may be a * * * *!—But hold—Here's t'ye again—this rum is generous Antigua, so a very unfit menstruum for scandal.

A-propos! How do you like, I mean *really* like, the married life? Ah! my friend, matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick youths and sighing girls take it to be! But marriage, we are told, is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of his institutions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you *my* ideas of the conjugal state (*en passant*, you know I am no Latinist: is not *conjugal* derived from

jugum, a yoke?) Well, then, the scale of good wifeship I divide into ten parts:—Good-nature, four; Good Sense, two; Wit, one; Personal Charms, viz. a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage (I would add a fine waist too, but that is so soon spoilt you know), all these, one; as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on a wife, such as Fortune, Connexions, Education (I mean education extraordinary), Family Blood, &c., divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by *fractions*, for there is not any one of them, in the aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an *integer*.

As for the rest of my fancies and reveries—how I lately met with Miss L * * * * B * * * *, the most beautiful, elegant woman in the world—how I accompanied her and her father's family fifteen miles on their journey out of pure devotion, to admire the loveliness of the works of God, in such an unequalled display of them—how, in galloping home at night, I made a ballad on her, of which these two stanzas made a part—

Thou, bonnie L * * *, art a queen,
 Thy subjects we before thee;
 Thou, bonnie L * * *, art divine,
 The hearts o' men adore thee.

The very Deil he could na scathe
 Whatever wad belang thee!
 He'd look into thy bonnie face,
 And say, ' I canna wrang thee!'

—Behold all these things are written in the chro-

nicles of my imaginations, and shall be read by thee, my dear friend, and by thy beloved spouse, my other dear friend, at a more convenient season.

Now, to thee, and to thy before-designed *bosom*-companion, be given the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things brought forth by the moon, and the benignant influences of the stars, and the living streams which flow from the fountains of life, and by the tree of life, for ever and ever! Amen!

CIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

Dumfries, 16th Sept. 1792.

SIR,

I HAVE just this moment got your letter. As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. Only, don't hurry me: "Deil tak the hindmost," is by no means the *cri de guerre* of my muse. Will you, as I am inferior to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the poetry and music of old Caledonia, and, since you request it, have cheerfully promised my mite of assistance—will you let me have a list of your airs, with the first line of the printed verses you intend for them, that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me. You know 'tis in the way of my trade; still leaving you, gentlemen, the undoubted right of publishers, to approve or reject,

at your pleasure, for your own publication. A-propos! if you are for *English* verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue. English verses, particularly the works of Scotsmen, that have merit, are certainly very eligible. *Tweedside! Ah! the poor shepherd's mournful fate! Ah! Cloris could I now but sit,* &c. you cannot mend; but such insipid stuff as, *To Fanny fair could I impart,* &c., usually set to *The Mill, Mill O,* is a disgrace to the collections in which it has already appeared, and would doubly disgrace a collection that will have the very superior merit of yours. But more of this in the farther prosecution of the business, if I am called on for my strictures and amendments—I say amendments; for I will not alter except where I myself at least think that I amend.

As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c. would be downright *prostitution of soul!* A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favour. In the rustic phrase of the season, “Gude speed the wark!”

I am, Sir,
Your very humble servant,

R. BURNS.

P. S. I have some particular reasons for wishing my interference to be known as little as possible.

CV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

LET me tell you that you are too fastidious in your ideas of songs and ballads. I own that your criticisms are just; the songs you specify in your list have *all, but one*, the faults you remark in them; but who shall mend the matter? Who shall rise up and say—Go to, I will make a better? For instance, on reading over the *Lea-rig*, I immediately set about trying my hand on it, and, after all, I could make nothing more of it than the following, which Heaven knows is poor enough:

“When o'er the hill the eastern star,” &c.

See *Songs*.

Your observation as to the aptitude of Dr. Percy's ballad to the air *Nanie O*, is just. It is besides, perhaps, the most beautiful ballad in the English language. But let me remark to you, that, in the sentiment and style of our Scottish airs, there is a pastoral simplicity, a something that one may call the Doric style and dialect of vocal music, to which a dash of our native tongue and manners is particularly, nay peculiarly, apposite. For this reason, and, upon my honour, for this reason alone, I am of opinion (but, as I told you before, my opinion is yours, freely yours, to approve or reject, as you please) that my ballad of *Nanie O* might, perhaps, do for one set of verses to the tune. Now don't

let it enter into your head, that you are under any necessity of taking my verses. I have long ago made up my mind as to my own reputation in the business of authorship; and have nothing to be pleased or offended at, in your adoption or rejection of my verses. Though you should reject one-half of what I give you, I shall be pleased with your adopting the other half, and shall continue to serve you with the same assiduity.

In the printed copy of my *Nanie O*, the name of the river is horridly prosaic. I will alter it,

“ Behind yon hills where *Lugar* flows,” &c.

See *Songs*.

Girvan is the name of the river that suits the idea of the stanza best, but *Lugar* is the most agreeable modulation of syllables.

I will soon give you a great many more remarks on this business; but I have just now an opportunity of conveying you this scrawl, free of postage, an expense that it is ill able to pay: so, with my best compliments to honest Allan, Good be wi' ye, &c.

Friday night.

* * * *

Saturday morning.

As I find I have still an hour to spare this morning before my conveyance goes away, I will give you *Nanie O* at length.*

Your remarks on *Ewe-bughts*, *Marion*, are just: still it has obtained a place among our more classical Scottish Songs; and what, with many beauties

* See *Songs*.

in its composition, and more prejudices in its favour, you will not find it easy to supplant it.

In my very early years, when I was thinking of going to the West Indies, I took the following farewell of a dear girl. It is quite trifling, and has nothing of the merits of *Ewe-bughts*; but it will fill up this page. You must know, that all my earlier love-songs were the breathings of ardent passion; and though it might have been easy in after-times to have given them a polish, yet that polish to me, whose they were, and who perhaps alone cared for them, would have defaced the legend of my heart, which was so faithfully inscribed on them. Their uncouth simplicity was, as they say of wines, their *race*.

“ Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary?” &c.*

Galla Water, and *Auld Rob Morris*, I think, will most probably be the next subject of my musings. However, even on *my verses*, speak out your criticisms with equal frankness. My wish is, not to stand aloof, the uncomplying bigot of *opiniâtreté*, but cordially to join issue with you in the furtherance of the work.

* It is not necessary to refer the reader in future to the *Songs*. In the Letters to Mr. Thomson the first lines of the songs enclosed by the author will only be given.

CVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 24th Sept. 1792.

At this moment, my dear madam, yours of the
 -third. All your other kind reproaches, your
 &c. are out of my head when I read and
 on Mrs. H * * * 's situation. Good God! a
 wounded, helpless young woman—in a strange
 land, and that land convulsed with every
 that can harrow the human feelings—sick—
 3, longing for a comforter, but finding none
 other's feelings, too—but it is too much:
 o wounded (He only can) may He heal! *

sh the farmer great joy of his new acquisition
 family. * * * * * I can-
 y that I give him joy of his life as a farmer.
 is a farmer paying a dear unconscionable
cursed life! As to a laird farming his own
 ty; sowing his own corn in hope; and reap-
 , in spite of brittle weather, in gladness;
 ng that none can say unto him, 'what doest
 —fattening his herds; shearing his flocks;
 ng at Christmas; and begetting sons and
 ters, until he be the venerated gray-haired
 of a little tribe—'tis a heavenly life!—But
 ake the life of reaping the fruits that another
 eat!

his much-lamented lady was gone to the south of
 with her infant son, where she died soon after.

BURNS'S LETTERS.

Well, your kind wishes will be gratified, as to
eing me, when I make my Ayrshire visit. I can-
ot leave Mrs. B * * * * until her nine months' race
run, which may perhaps be in three or four
eeks. She, too, seems determined to make me the
atriarchal leader of a band. However, if Heaven
ill be so obliging as to let me have them in the
roportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so
uch the more pleased. I hope, if I am spared
ith them, to show a set of boys that will do ho-
our to my cares and name; but I am not equal to
he task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor;
girl should always have a fortune. A-propos!
our little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a
ery devil. He, though two years younger, has
ompletely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed
he mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a
most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of
his schoolmaster.

You know how readily we get into prattle upon a
subject dear to our heart: you can excuse it. God
bless you and yours!

CVII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

*Supposed to have been written on the Death of
Mrs. H * * *, her Daughter.*

I HAD been from home, and did not receive your
letter until my return the other day. What shall I
say to comfort you, my much-valued, much afflicted
friend! I can but grieve with you; consolation I

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have none to offer, except that which religion holds out to the children of affliction — *Children of affliction!*—how just the expression! and like every other family, they have matters among them, which they hear, see, and feel in a serious, all-important manner, of which the world has not, nor cares to have, any idea. The world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence.

Alas, madam! who would wish for many years? What is it but to drag-existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery; like the gloom which blots out the stars one by one, from the face of night, and leaves us without a ray of comfort in the howling waste!

I am interrupted, and must leave off. You shall soon hear from me again.

CVIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

November 8th, 1792.

If you mean, my dear sir, that all the songs in your collection shall be poetry of the first merit, I am afraid you will find more difficulty in the undertaking than you are aware of. There is a peculiar rhythmus in many of our airs, and a necessity of adapting syllables to the emphasis, or what I would call the *feature notes* of the tune, that cramp the poet, and lay him under almost insuperable difficulties. For instance, in the air, *My wife's a wanton wee thing*, if a few lines smooth and pretty can be adapted to it, it is all you can expect. The following were

made extempore to it; and though, on farther study, I might give you something more profound, yet it might not suit the light-horse gallop of the air so well as this random clink.

“ She is a winsome wee thing,” &c.

I have just been looking over the *Collier's bonny Dochter*; and if the following rhapsody, which I composed the other day, on a charming Ayrshire girl, Miss * * *, as she passed through this place to England, will suit your taste better than the *Collier Lassie*, fall on and welcome.

“ O saw ye bonnie Lesley,” &c.

I have hitherto deferred the sublimer, more pathetic airs, until more leisure, as they will take, and deserve, a greater effort. However, they are all put into your hands, as clay into the hands of the potter, to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour. Farewell, &c.

CIX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

WITH “ HIGHLAND MARY.”

“ Ye banks, and braes, and streams around,” &c.

14th November, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AGREE with you that the song, *Katharine Ogie*, is very poor stuff, and unworthy, altogether unworthy, of so beautiful an air. I tried to mend it, but

the awkward sound *Ogie* recutting so often in the rhyme, spoils every attempt at introducing sentiment into the piece. The foregoing song pleases myself; I think it is in my happiest manner; you will see at first glance that it suits the air. The subject of the song is one of the most interesting passages of my youthful days; and I own that I should be much flattered to see the verses set to an air which would ensure celebrity. Perhaps, after all, 'tis the still glowing prejudice of my heart, that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition.

I have partly taken your idea of *Auld Rob Morris*. I have adopted the two first verses, and am going on with the song on a new plan, which promises pretty well. I take up one or another, just as the bee of the moment buzzes in my bonnet-lug; and do you, *sans ceremonie*, make what use you choose of the productions. Adieu! &c.

CX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

Dumfries, 1st Dec. 1792.

YOUR alterations of my *Nahie O* are perfectly right. So are those of *My wife's a wanton wée thing*. Your alteration of the second stanza is a positive improvement. Now, my dear sir, with the freedom which characterizes our correspondence, I must not, cannot alter *Bonnie Lesley*. You are right, the word "Alexander" makes the line a little uncouth, but I think the thought is pretty. Of Alexander, beyond all other heroes, it may be said, in the sublime

language of Scripture, that "he went forth conquering and to conquer."

"For Nature made her *what she is*,
And never made anither." (Such a person as she is.)

This is in my opinion more poetical than "Ne'er made sic anither." However, it is immaterial: make it either way. "Caledonie," I agree with you, is not so good a word as could be wished, though it is sanctioned in three or four instances by Allan Ramsay: but I cannot help it. In short, that species of stanza is the most difficult that I have ever tried.

The *Lea-rig* is as follows. (*Here the poet gives the two first stanzas, as before, with the following in addition.*)

The hunter lo'es the morning sun,
To rouse the mountain deer, my jo:
At noon the fisher seeks the glen,
Along the burn to steer, my jo;
Gie me the hour o' gloamin grey,
It maks my heart sae cheery, O,
To meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O.

I am interrupted.

Yours, &c.

CXI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

WITH "AULD ROB MORRIS."

"There's auld Rob Morris that wons in yon glen," &c.

AND "DUNCAN GRAY."

"Duncan Gray cam here to woo," &c.

4th December, 1792.

THE foregoing I submit, my dear sir, to your better judgment. Acquit them, or condemn them, as seemeth good in your sight. Duncan Gray is that kind of light-horse gallop of an air, which precludes sentiment. The ludicrous is its ruling feature.

CXII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

• Dumfries, 6th Dec. 1792.

I SHALL be in Ayrshire, I think, next week; and, if at all possible, I shall certainly, my much-esteemed friend, have the pleasure of visiting at Dunlop-House.

Alas, madam! how seldom do we meet in this world, that we have reason to congratulate ourselves on accessions of happiness! I have not passed half the ordinary term of an old man's life, and yet I scarcely look over the obituary of a newspaper, that I do not see some names that I have known,

and which I and other acquaintances little thought to meet with there so soon. Every other instance of the mortality of our kind makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehension for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals? Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life more than another? A few years ago, I could have lain down in the dust, "careless of the voice of the morning;" and now not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their "staff and shield." By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition, Mrs. B**** having given me a fine girl, since I wrote you. There is a charming passage in Thomson's *Edward and Eleanor*—

"The valiant *in himself*, what can he suffer?
Or what need he regard his *single woes*?" &c.

As I am got in the way of quotations, I shall give you another from the same piece, peculiarly, alas! too peculiarly apposite, my dear madam, to your present frame of mind:

"Who so unworthy but may proudly deck him
With his fair-weather virtue, that exults
Glad o'er the summer main? the tempest comes,
The rough winds rage aloud; when from the helm
This virtue shrinks, and in a corner lies
Lamenting—Heavens! if privileged from trial,
How cheap a thing were virtue!"

I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson's dramas. I pick up favourite quotations, and store them in my mind as ready armour, offen-

sive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his *Alfred* :

“ Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
And offices of life : to life itself,
With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose.”

Probably I have quoted some of these to you formerly, as indeed when I write from the heart, I am apt to be guilty of such repetitions. The compass of the heart, in the musical style of expression, is much more bounded than that of the imagination ; so the notes of the former are extremely apt to run into one another ; but in return for the paucity of its compass, its few notes are much more sweet. I must still give you another quotation, which I am almost sure I have given you before, but I cannot resist the temptation. The subject is religion—speaking of its importance to mankind, the author says,

“ 'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright.”

I see you are in for a double postage, so I shall e'en scribble out t'other sheet. We, in this country here, have many alarms of the reforming, or rather the republican spirit, of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a *placeman*, you know ; a very humble one indeed, heaven knows, but still so much so as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter.

* * * * *

I have taken up the subject in another view, and the other day, for a pretty actress's benefit night, I

wrote an Address, which I will give on the other page, called the *The Rights of Woman*.

“ While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,” &c.
See *Poems*.

I shall have the honour of receiving your criticisms in person at Dunlop.

CXIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

WITH

“ O Poortith cauld, and restless love,” &c.

AND “ GALLA WATER.”

“ There's braw braw lads on Yarrow braes,” &c.

Jan. 1793.

MANY returns of the season to you, my dear sir. How comes on your publication? will these two foregoing be of any service to you? I should like to know what songs you print to each tune besides the verses to which it is set. In short, I would wish to give you my opinion on all the poetry you publish. You know it is my trade, and a man in the way of his trade may suggest useful hints, that escape men of much superior parts and endowments in other things.

If you meet with my dear and much-valued C., greet him, in my name, with the compliments of the season.

Yours, &c.

CXIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

26th January, 1793.

ROVE greatly, my dear sir, of your plans : Dr. Hume's essay will of itself be a treasure. On that part, I mean to draw up an appendix to the Doctor's essay, containing my stock of anecdotes, of our Scots songs. All the late Mr. Tytler's notes I have by me, taken down in the course of my acquaintance with him from his own mouth. I am such an enthusiast, that, in the course of my several peregrinations through Scotland, I made a catalogue to the individual spot from which every note took its rise ; *Lochaber*, and the *Braes of Balnakeil*, excepted. So far as the locality, either from the title of the air, or the tenor of the song, could be ascertained, I have paid my devotions at the particular shrine of every Scots muse.

Do not doubt but you might make a very valuable collection of Jacobite songs ; but would it give any pleasure ? In the mean time, do not you think that some of them, particularly *The sow's tail to Geordie*, set to a new air, with other words, might be well worth a place in your collection of lively songs ?

If it were possible to procure songs of merit, it would be proper to have one set of Scots words to be set to a new air, and that the set of words to which the new air ought to be set. There is a *naïveté*, a pastoral simplicity, in a slight intermixture of Scots words and phraseology, which is more in unison (at least

to my taste, and I will add to every genuine Caledonian taste) with the simple pathos, or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever.

The very name of Peter Pindar is an acquisition to your work. His *Gregory* is beautiful. I have tried to give you a set of stanzas in Scots, on the same subject, which are at your service. Not that I intend to enter the lists with Peter; that would be presumption indeed. My song, though much inferior in poetic merit, has I think more of the ballad simplicity in it.

“ O mirk, mirk is this midnight hour,” &c.

My most respectful compliments to the honourable gentleman who favoured me with a postscript in your last. He shall hear from me and receive his MSS. soon.

CXV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

WITH “ MARY MORISON.”

“ O Mary, at thy window be,” &c.

20th March, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE song prefixed is one of my juvenile works. I leave it in your hands. I do not think it very remarkable, either for its merits or demerits. It is impossible (at least I feel it so in my stunted powers) to be always original, entertaining, and witty.

What is become of the list, &c. of your songs? I shall be out of all temper with you by-and-by. I always looked upon myself as the prince of contented correspondents, and valued myself accordingly; and I will not, cannot bear rivalry from any body else.

CXVI.

TO MISS B*****, OF YORK.

21st March, 1793.

DAM,

How many things for which I envy those hale, lived old fellows before the flood, is this singular, that when they met with any body after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-

time, in this short, stormy, winter day of our mortal existence, when you now and then, in the way of Accidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you, that you shall never meet that valued character more. On the other hand, as brief as this miserable being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there be a miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill-run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the overtakings, turnings, and windings of life, pop, at some unlucky corner, eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not spare your indignation or contempt a moment's re-

pose. As I am a sturdy believer in the powers of darkness, I take these to be the doings of that old author of mischief, the devil. It is well known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts, and I make no doubt that he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss B*****; how much I admired her abilities, and valued her worth, and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss H**** tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the enclosed sonnet, though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honour to be, &c.

CXVII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

7th April, 1793.

THANK you, my dear sir, for your packet. You cannot imagine how much this business of composing for your publication has added to my enjoyments. What with my early attachment to ballads, your books, &c. ballad-making is now as completely my hobby-horse, as ever fortification was Uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race (God grant that I may take the right side of the winning post!) and then cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have

been happy, I shall say or sing, "Sae merry as we a' hae been!" and raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of *Coila** shall be, "Good night and joy be wi' you a'!" So much for my last words: now for a few present remarks, as they have occurred at random on looking over your list.

The first lines of *The last time I came o'er the moor*, and several other lines in it, are beautiful; but in my opinion — pardon me, revered shade of Ramsay! the song is unworthy of the divine air. I shall try to *make or mend*. *For ever, Fortune, wilt thou prove*, is a charming song! but *Logan burn and Logan braes*, are sweetly susceptible of rural imagery: I'll try that likewise, and if I succeed, the other song may class among the English ones. I remember the two last lines of a verse, in some of the old songs of *Logan Water* (for I know a good many different ones) which I think pretty.

"Now my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan braes," &c.†

My Pattie is a lover gay, is unequal. "His mind is never muddy," is a muddy expression indeed.

"Then I'll resign, and marry Pate,
And syne my cockernony."—

This is surely far unworthy of Ramsay, or your

* Burns here calls himself the *Voice of Coila*, in imitation of Ossian, who denominates himself the *Voice of Cona*. *Sae merry as we a' hae been*; and *Good night and joy be wi' you a'*, are the names of two Scottish tunes.

† He was mistaken in supposing it to be a song of the olden time; it is the production of Mr. John Mayne.

book. My song, *Rigs of Barley*, to the same tune, does not altogether please me ; but if I can mend it, and thrash a few loose sentiments out of it, I will submit it to your consideration. *The Lass o' Patie's Mill* is one of Ramsay's best songs ; but there is one loose sentiment in it, which my much-valued friend Mr. Erskine will take into his critical consideration.— In Sir J. Sinclair's Statistical volumes, are two claims, one, I think, from Aberdeenshire, and the other from Ayrshire, for the honour of this song. The following anecdote, which I had from the present sir William Cunningham, of Robertland, who had it of the late John, earl of Loudon, I can, on such authorities, believe.

Allan Ramsay was residing at Loudon-castle with the then earl, father to earl John ; and one forenoon, riding or walking out together, his lordship and Allan passed a sweet romantic spot on Irvine water, still called " Patie's Mill," where a bonnie lass was "tedding hay, bareheaded on the green." My lord observed to Allan, that it would be a fine theme for a song. Ramsay took the hint, and lingering behind, he composed the first sketch of it, which he produced at dinner.

One day I heard Mary say, is a fine song ; but for consistency's sake alter the name " Adonis." Were there ever such banns published, as a purpose of marriage between *Adonis* and *Mary*? I agree with you that my song, *There's nought but care on every hand*, is much superior to *Poortith cauld*. The original song, *The Mill mill O*, though excellent, is, on account of delicacy, inadmissible ; still I like the title, and think a Scottish song would suit the notes best ; and let your chosen song, which is very

pretty, follow, as an English set. *The Banks of the Dee*, is, you know, literally *Langolee*, to slow time. The song is well enough, but has some false imagery in it : for instance,

“ And sweetly the nightingale sung from the tree.”

In the first place, the nightingale sings in a low bush, but never from a tree ; and in the second place, there never was a nightingale seen or heard, on the banks of the Dee, or on the banks of any other river in Scotland. Exotic rural imagery is always comparatively flat. If I could hit on another stanza, equal to *The small birds rejoice, &c.*, I do myself honestly avow, that I think it a superior song. *John Anderson my jo*—the song to this tune in Johnson's Museum, is my composition, and I think it not my worst : if it suit you, take it, and welcome. Your collection of sentimental and pathetic songs, is, in my opinion, very complete ; but not so your comic ones. Where are *Tullochgorum*, *Lumps o' puddin*, *Tibbie Fowler*, and several others, which, in my humble judgment, are well worthy of preservation ? There is also one sentimental song of mine in the Museum, which never was known out of the immediate neighbourhood, until I got it taken down from a country girl's singing. It is called *Craigieburn Wood* ; and, in the opinion of Mr. Clarke, is one of the sweetest Scottish songs. He is quite an enthusiast about it : and I would take his taste in Scottish music against the taste of most connoisseurs.

You are quite right in inserting the last five in your list, though they are certainly Irish. *Shepherds, I have lost my love !* is to me a heavenly air—what

would you think of a set of Scottish verses to it? I have made one to it a good while ago, which I think
 * * * * * but in its original state is not quite a lady's song. I enclose an altered, not amended copy for you, if you choose to set the tune to it, and let the Irish verses follow.

Mr. Erskine's songs are all pretty, but his *Lone Vale* is divine.

Yours, &c.

Let me know just how you like these random hints.

CXVIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1793.

I HAVE yours, my dear sir, this moment. I shall answer it and your former letter, in my desultory way of saying whatever comes uppermost.

The business of many of our tunes wanting, at the beginning, what fiddlers call a starting-note, is often a rub to us poor rhymers.

“ There's braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
 That wander thro' the blooming heather,”

you may alter to

“ Braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
 Ye wander, &c.”

My song, *Here awa, there awa*, as amended by Mr. Erskine, I entirely approve of, and return you.

Give me leave to criticise your taste in the only thing in which it is in my opinion reprehensible. You know I ought to know something of my own

trade. Of pathos, sentiment, and point, you are a complete judge ; but there is a quality more necessary than either, in a song, and which is the very essence of a ballad, I mean simplicity: now, if I mistake not, this last feature you are a little apt to sacrifice to the foregoing.

Ramsay, as every other poet, has not been always equally happy in his pieces ; still I cannot approve of taking such liberties with an author as Mr. W. proposes doing with *The last time I came o'er the moor*. Let a poet, if he chooses, take up the idea of another, and work it into a piece of his own ; but to mangle the works of the poor bard, whose tuneful tongue is now mute for ever, in the dark and narrow house ; by Heaven 'twould be sacrilege ! I grant that Mr. W.'s version is an improvement ; but I know Mr. W. well, and esteem him much ; let him mend the song, as the Highlander mended his gun ;— he gave it a new stock, a new lock, and a new barrel.

I do not by this object to leaving out improper stanzas, where that can be done without spoiling the whole. One stanza in *The lass o' Pattie's Mill* must be left out : the song will be nothing worse for it. I am not sure if we can take the same liberty with *Corn rigs are bonnie*. Perhaps it might want the last stanza, and be the better for it. *Cauld kail in Aberdeen* you must leave with me yet awhile. I have vowed to have a song to that air, on the lady whom I attempted to celebrate in the verses, *Poor-tith cauld and restless love*. At any rate my other song, *Green grow the rashes*, will never suit. That song is current in Scotland under the old title, and to the merry old tune of that name, which of course

would mar the progress of your song to celebrity. Your book will be the standard of Scots songs for the future : let this idea ever keep your judgment on the alarm.

I send a song, on a celebrated toast in this country, to suit *Bonnie Dundee*. I send you also a ballad to the *Mill mill O*.*

The last time I came o'er the moor, I would fain attempt to make a Scots song for, and let Ramsay's be the English set. You shall hear from me soon. When you go to London on this business, can you come by Dumfries? I have still several MSS. Scots airs by me which I have picked up, mostly from the singing of country lasses. They please me vastly; but your learned *lugs*† would perhaps be displeas'd with the very feature for which I like them. I call them simple; you would pronounce them silly. Do you know a fine air called *Jackie Hume's Lament*? I have a song of considerable merit to that air. I'll enclose you both the song and tune, as I had them ready to send to Johnson's Museum.‡ I send you likewise, to me, a beautiful little air, which I had taken down from *viva voce*. Adieu!

* The ballad to the *Mill mill O*, is that beginning,

"When wild war's deadly blasts are blawn."

† Ears.

‡ The song here mentioned, is, *O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten?* This song is surely Burns's own writing, though he does not generally praise his own songs so much.

CXIX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAD scarcely put my last letter into the post-office, when I took up the subject of *The last time I came o'er the moor*, and, ere I slept, drew the outlines of the foregoing. How far I have succeeded, I leave on this, as on every other occasion, to you to decide. I own my vanity is flattered, when you give my songs a place in your elegant and superb work; but to be of service to the work is my first wish. As I have often told you, I do not in a single instance wish you, out of compliment to me, to insert any thing of mine. One hint let me give you—whatever Mr. Pleyel does, let him not alter one *iota* of the original Scottish airs: I mean in the song department; but let our national music preserve its native features. They are, I own, frequently wild and irreducible to the more modern rules; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect.

CXX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

June, 1793.

WHEN I tell you, my dear sir, that a friend of mine, in whom I am much interested, has fallen a sacrifice to these accursed times, you will easily allow

that it might unhinge me for doing any good among ballads. My own loss, as to pecuniary matters, is trifling; but the total ruin of a much-loved friend, is a loss indeed. Pardon my seeming inattention to your last commands.

I cannot alter the disputed lines in the *Mill mill O*. What you think a defect, I esteem as a positive beauty; so you see how doctors differ. I shall now, with as much alacrity as I can muster, go on with your commands.

You know Frazer, the hautboy player in Edinburgh—he is here, instructing a band of music for a fencible corps quartered in this country. Among many of his airs that please me, there is one, well known as a reel, by the name of *The Quaker's Wife*; and which I remember a grand aunt of mine used to sing, by the name of *Liggeram Cosh, my bonnie wee lass*. Mr. Frazer plays it slow, and with an expression that quite charms me. I became such an enthusiast about it, that I made a song for it, which I here subjoin; and enclose Frazer's set of the tune. If they hit your fancy, they are at your service; if not, return me the tune, and I will put it in Johnson's Museum. I think the song is not in my worst manner.

“ Blithe hae I been on yon hill,” &c.

I should wish to hear how this pleases you.

BURNS'S LETTERS.

CXXI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

25th June, 17

HAVE you ever, my dear sir, felt your bosom to burst with indignation on reading of those mi-
villains who divide kingdom against kingdom
solate provinces, and lay nations waste, out o
wantornness of ambition, or often from still
ignoble passions? In a mood of this kind to-
I recollected the air of *Logan Water*; and i
curred to me that its querulous melody prot
had its origin from the plaintive indignatio
some swelling, suffering heart, fired at the tyra
strides of some public destroyer; and overwhel
with private distress, the consequence of a coun
ruin. If I have done any thing at all like ju
to my feelings, the following song, compose
three-quarters of an hour's meditation in my el
chair, ought to have some merit.

“ O Logan, sweetly didst thou glide,” &c.

Do you know the following beautiful little f
ment in Witherspoon's collection of Scots songs!

Air—“ *Hughie Graham.*”

“ O gin my love were yon red rose,
That grows upon the castle wa';
And I mysel' a drap o' dew,
Into her bonnie breast to fa'!

Oh ! there, beyond expression bless'd,
 I'd feast on beauty a' the night :
 Seal'd on her silk-soft faulds to rest,
 Till fle'y'd awa by Phœbus' light."

This thought is inexpressibly beautiful; and quite, so far as I know, original. It is too short for a song, else I would forswear you altogether unless you gave it a place. I have often tried to make a stanza to it, but in vain. After balancing myself for a musing five minutes, on the hind-end of my elbow chair, I produced the following.

The verses are far inferior to the foregoing; but if worthy of insertion at all, they might be first in place; as every poet, who knows any thing of his trade, will husband his thoughts for a concluding stroke.

O, were my love yon lilac fair,
 Wi' purple blossoms to the spring;
 And I, a bird to shelter there,
 When wearied on my little wing:

How I wad mourn, when it was torn
 By autumn wild, and winter rude!
 But I wad sing on wanton wing,
 When youthfu' May its bloom renew'd.

CXXII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

July 2d, 1793

MY DEAR SIR,
 I HAVE just finished the following ballad, and do think it in my best style, I send it you.

Clarke, who wrote down the air from Mrs. Burns's *wood-note wild*, is very fond of it, and has given it a celebrity, by teaching it to some young ladies of the first fashion here. If you do not like the air enough to give it a place in your collection, please return it. The song you may keep, as I remember it.

“ There was a lass, and she was fair,” &c.

I have some thoughts of inserting in your index, or in my notes, the names of the fair ones, the themes of my songs. I do not mean the name at full ; but dashes or asterisms, so as ingenuity may find them out.

The heroine of the foregoing is miss M., daughter to Mr. M. of D., one of your subscribers. I have not painted her in the rank which she holds in life, but in the dress and character of a cöt-tager.

CXXIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

July, 1793.

I ASSURE you, my dear sir, that you truly hurt me with your pecuniary parcel. It degrades me in my own eyes. However, to return it would savour of affectation ; but as to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear by that HONOUR which crowns the upright statue of ROBERT BURNS'S INTEGRITY—on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the by-past transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you ! BURNS'S character for generosity of sentiment and

independence of mind, will, I trust, long outlive any of his wants which the cold unfeeling ore can supply : at least, I will take care that such a character he shall deserve.

Thank you for my copy of your publication. Never did my eyes behold, in any musical work, such elegance and correctness. Your preface, too, is admirably written ; only your partiality to me has made you say too much : however, it will bind me down to double every effort in the future progress of the work. The following are a few remarks on the songs in the list you sent me. I never copy what I write to you, so I may be often tautological, or perhaps contradictory.

The Flowers of the Forest is charming as a poem, and should be, and must be, set to the notes ; but, though out of your rule, the three stanzas beginning,

“ I hae seen the smiling o’ fortune beguiling,”

are worthy of a place, were it but to immortalize the author of them, who is an old lady of my acquaintance, and at this moment living in Edinburgh. She is a Mrs. Cockburn ; I forget of what place ; but from Roxburghshire. What a charming apostrophe is

“ O fickle fortune, why this cruel sporting,

“ Why, why torment us—*poor sons of a day!*”

The old ballad, *I wish I were where Helen lies*, is silly to contemptibility. My alteration of it in Johnson’s is not much better. Mr. Pinkerton, in his, what he calls ancient ballads (many of them notorious, though beautiful enough, forgeries) has

the best set. It is full of his own interpolations, but no matter.

In my next I will suggest to your consideration a few songs which may have escaped your hurried notice. In the mean time, allow me to congratulate you now, as a brother of the quill. You have *committed* your character and fame; which will now be tried for ages to come, by the illustrious jury of the SONS and DAUGHTERS of TASTE—all whom poesy can please, or music charm.

Being a bard of nature, I have some pretensions to second sight; and I am warranted by the spirit to foretell and affirm, that your great-grand-child will hold up your volumes, and say, with honest pride, "This so much admired selection was the work of my ancestor."

CXXIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

MY DEAR THOMSON,

I hold the pen for our friend Clarke, who at present is studying the music of the spheres at my elbow. The *Georgium Sidus* he thinks is rather out of tune; so until he rectify that matter, he cannot stoop to terrestrial affairs.

He sends you six of the Rondeau subjects, and if more are wanted, he says you shall have them.

* * * * *

Confound your long stairs!

S. CLARKE.

CXXV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

YOUR objection, my dear sir, to the passages in my song of *Logan Water*, is right in one instance; but it is difficult to mend it: if I can, I will. The other passage you object to, does not appear in the same light to me.

I have tried my hand on *Robin Adair*, and you will probably think, with little success; but it is such a cursed, cramp, out-of-the-way measure, that I despair of doing any thing better to it.

“ While larks with little wing,” &c.

So much for namby-pamby. I may, after all, put my hand on it in Scots verse. There I always am myself and most at home.

I have just put the last hand to the song I meant for *Cauld Kail in Aberdeen*. If it suits you to insert it, I shall be pleased, as the heroine is a favourite of mine: if not, I shall also be pleased; because I wish, and will be glad, to see you act decidedly on the business. 'Tis a tribute, as a man of taste, and as an editor, which you owe yourself,

CXXVI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

THAT crinkum-crankum tune, *Robin Adair*, has run so in my head, and I succeeded so ill in my last attempt, that I have ventured in this morning's walk, one essay more. You, my dear sir, will remember an unfortunate part of our worthy friend C.'s story, which happened about three years ago. That struck my fancy, and I endeavoured to do the idea justice as follows :

“ Had I a cave on some wild, distant shore,” &c.

By the way, I have met with a musical Highlander in Breadalbane's Fencibles, which are quartered here, who assures me that he well remembers his mother's singing Gaelic songs to both *Robin Adair* and *Gramachree*. They certainly have more of the Scotch than Irish taste in them.

This man comes from the vicinity of Inverness : so it could not be any intercourse with Ireland that could bring them ;—except, what I shrewdly suspect to be the case, the wandering minstrels, harpers, and pipers, used to go frequently errant through the wilds both of Scotland and Ireland, and so some favourite airs might be common to both. A case in point—They have lately, in Ireland, published an Irish air, as they say, called *Cain du delish*. The fact is, in a publication of Corri's, a great while ago, you will find the same air, called a

Highland one, with a Gaelic song *set* to it. Its name there, I think, is *Oran Gaoil*, and a fine air it is. Do ask honest Allan, or the Rev. Gaelic Parson, about these matters.

CXXVII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

LET me in this ae night, I will reconsider. I am glad that you are pleased with my song, *Had I a cave*, &c., as I liked it myself.

I walked out yesterday evening with a volume of the Museum in my hand; when, turning up *Allan Water*, "What numbers shall the muse repeat," &c., as the words appeared to me rather unworthy of so fine an air, and recollecting that it is on your list, I sat and raved under the shade of an old thorn, till I wrote one to suit the measure. I may be wrong; but I think it not in my worst style. You must know, that in Ramsay's Tea-table, where the modern song first appeared, the ancient name of the tune, Allan says, is *Allan Water*, or *My love Annie's very bonnie*. This last has certainly been a line of the original song; so I took up the idea, and as you will see, have introduced the line in its place, which I presume it formerly occupied; though I likewise give you a *choosing line*, if it should not hit the cut of your fancy.

"By Allan-stream I chance to rove," &c.

Bravo! say I: it is a good song. Should you

ink so too (not else), you can set the music to it, and let the other follow as English verses.

Autumn is my propitious season. I make more verses in it than all the year else.

God bless you !

CXXVIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad, one of our airs? I admire it much; and yesterday I set the following verses to it. Urbani, whom I have met with here, begged them of me, as he admires the air much; but as I understand that he looks rather an evil eye on your work, I did not choose to comply. However, if the song does not offend your taste, I may possibly send it him. The setting of the air which I had in my eye is in Johnson's museum.

" O whistle, and I'll come to you my lad," &c.

Another favourite air of mine is *The muckin' o' Jockie's Byre*; when sung slow with expression, I have wished that it had had better poetry: that I have endeavoured to supply as follows:

" Adown winding Nith I did wander," &c.

Mr. Clarke begs you to give miss Phyllis a corner of your book, as she is a particular flame of his.

She is a miss P. M., sister to *Bonnie Jean*. They are both pupils of his. You shall hear from me the very first grist I get from my rhyming-mill.

CXXIX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

THAT tune, *Cauld Kail*, is such a favourite of yours, that I once more roved out yesterday for a gloamin-shot at the muses; when the muse that presides o'er the shores of Nith, or rather my old inspiring, dearest nymph, Coila, whispered me the following. I have two reasons for thinking that it was my early, sweet, simple inspirer that was by my elbow, "smooth gliding without step," and pouring the song on my glowing fancy. In the first place, since I left Coila's native haunts, not a fragment of a poet has arisen to cheer her solitary musings, by catching inspiration from her; so I more than suspect that she has followed me hither, or at least makes me occasional visits: secondly, the last stanza of this song I send you, is the very words that Coila taught me many years ago, and which I set to an old Scots reel in Johnson's Museum.

"Come, let me take thee to my breast," &c.

If you think the above will suit your idea of your favourite air, I shall be highly pleased. *The last time I came o'er the moor*, I cannot meddle with, as

ing it ; and the musical world have been so
 accustomed to Ramsay's words, that a different
 ough positively superior, would not be so
 ived. I am not fond of chorusses to songs,
 ; not made one for the foregoing.

CXXX.

TO MR. THOMSON,

WITH "DAINTY DAVIE."

Now rosy May comes in wth flowers," &c.

August, 1793.

for Davie. The chorus, you know, is to
 part of the tune. See Clarke's set of it in
 eum.

In the Museum they have drawled out the
 twelve lines of poetry, which is **** non-
 four lines of song, and four of chorus, is

CXXXI.

TO MISS C * * * .

August, 1793.

w,
 ther unlooked-for accidents have prevented
 g myself the honour of a second visit to
 nd, as I was so hospitably invited, and so
 y meant to have done. However, I still

hope to have that pleasure before the busy months of harvest begin.

I enclose you two of my late pieces, as some kind of return for the pleasure I have received in perusing a certain MS. volume of poems in the possession of captain Riddel. To repay one with an *old song*, is a proverb, whose force you, madam, I know, will not allow. What is said of illustrious descent is, I believe, equally true of a talent for poetry, none ever despised it who had pretensions to it. The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets. In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase: lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a

as miserable as a poet. To you, madam, I
do not recount the fairy pleasures the muse be-
comes to counterbalance this catalogue of evils.
Seductive poetry is like bewitching woman; she
at all ages been accused of misleading mankind
from the councils of wisdom and the paths of pru-
dence; involving them in difficulties, baiting them
with poverty, branding them with infamy, and
dragging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet,
there is the man but must own that all our happi-
ness on earth is not worthy the name—that even
the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisiacal
 bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun rising over
a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures,
the nameless raptures, that we owe to the lovely
Queen of the heart of Man!

CXXXII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

Sept. 1793.

You may readily trust, my dear sir, that any exer-
tion in my power is heartily at your service. But
one thing I must hint to you; the very name of
Peter Pindar is of great service to your publication,
so get a verse from him now and then; though I
have no objection, as well as I can, to bear the bur-
den of the business.

You know that my pretensions to musical taste
are merely a few of nature's instincts, untaught and
untutored by art. For this reason many musical
compositions, particularly where much of the merit

lies in counterpoint, however they may transport and ravish the ears of you connoisseurs, affect my simple lug no otherwise than merely as melodious din. On the other hand, by way of amends, I am delighted with many little melodies, which the learned musician despises as silly and insipid. I do not know whether the old air *Hey tuttie taitie* may rank among this number; but well I know that, with Frazer's hautboy, it' has often filled my eyes with tears. There is a tradition, which I have met with in many places of Scotland, that it was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn. This thought, in my solitary wanderings, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant Royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning.*

“ Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,” &c.

So may God ever defend the cause of truth and liberty, as He did that day! — Amen.

P.S. I showed the air to Urbani, who was highly pleased with it, and begged me to make soft verses for it; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same

* This noble strain was conceived by our poet during a storm among the wilds of Glen-Ken in Galloway.

nature, not quite so ancient, roused my rhyming mania. Clarke's set of the tune, with his bass, you will find in the Museum; though I am afraid that the air is not what will entitle it to a place in your elegant selection.

CXXXIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1794.

I DARE say, my dear sir, that you will begin to think my correspondence is persecution. No matter, I can't help it; a ballad is my hobby-horse; which though otherwise a simple sort of harmless idiotical-beast enough, has yet this blessed headstrong property, that when once it has fairly made off with a hapless wight, it gets so enamoured with the tinkle-gingle tinkle-gingle of its own bells, that it is sure to run poor pilgarlic, the bedlam-jockey, quite beyond any useful point or post in the common race of man.

The following song I have composed for *Oran-gaoil*, the Highland air, that, you tell me in your last, you have resolved to give a place to in your book. I have this moment finished the song, so you have it glowing from the mint. If it sult you, well!—if not, 'tis also well!

“ Behold the hour, the boat arrive,” &c.

CXXXIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

I HAVE received your list, my dear sir, and here go my observations on it.*

Down the burn Davie. I have this moment tried an alteration, leaving out the last half of the third stanza, and the first half of the last stanza, thus :

As down the burn they took their way,
And thro' the flowery dale;
His cheek to hers he aft did lay,
And love was ay the tale.

With " Mary, when shall we return,
Sic pleasure to renew?"
Quoth Mary, " Love, I like the burn,
And ay shall follow you."†

Thro' the wood laddie. I am decidedly of opinion, that both in this, and *There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame*, the second or high part of the tune being a repetition of the first part as

* Mr. Thomson's list of songs for his publication. In his remarks the bard proceeds in order, and goes through the whole; but on many of them he merely signifies his approbation. All his remarks of any importance are presented to the reader.

† This alteration Mr. Thomson has adopted (or at least intended to adopt), instead of the last stanza of the original song, which is objectionable in point of delicacy.

we higher, is only for instrumental music, and
 should be much better omitted in singing.

Lowden-knowes. Remember in your index that
 song in pure English to this tune, beginning,

“ When summer comes, the swains on Tweed,” &c.

the production of Crawford. Robert was his
 christian name.

Laddie lie near me, must *lie by me* for some time.
 I do not know the air; and until I am complete
 master of a tune, in my own singing (such as it is),
 I can never compose for it. My way is: I consider
 the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of
 the musical expression; then choose my theme;
 I sing one stanza; when that is composed, which
 is generally the most difficult part of the business,
 I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for
 objects in nature around me that are in unison and
 harmony with the cogitations of my fancy, and
 workings of my bosom; humming every now and
 then the air, with the verses I have framed. When
 I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the
 literary fire-side of my study, and there commit
 my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on
 the hind-legs of my elbow-chair; by way of calling
 forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes
 on. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably
 my way.

What cursed egotism!

Gill Morice I am for leaving out. It is a plagu-
 ous length; the air itself is never sung; and its place
 may well be supplied by one or two songs for fine-
 ness that are not in your list. For instance, *Craigie-
 burn Wood* and *Roy's Wife*. The first, beside its

intrinsic merit, has novelty; and the last has high merit, as well as great celebrity. I have the original words of a song for the last air, in the handwriting of the lady who composed it; and they are superior to any edition of the song which the public has yet seen.

Highland laddie. The old set will please a mere Scotch ear best; and the new, an Italianized one. There is a third, and what Oswald calls the old *Highland laddie*, which pleases me more than either of them. It is sometimes called *Ginglan Johnnie*; it being the air of an old humorous tawdry song of that name. You will find it in the Museum, *I hae been 'at Crookieden, &c.* I would advise you in this musical quandary, to offer up your prayers to the muses for inspiring direction; and in the mean time, waiting for this direction, bestow a libation to Bacchus; and there is not a doubt but you will hit on a judicious choice. *Probatum est.*

Auld Sir Simon I must beg you to leave out, and put in its place *The Quaker's Wife.*

Blithe hae I been o'er the hill, is one of the finest songs ever I made in my life; and besides, is composed on a young lady, positively the most beautiful woman in the world. As I purpose giving you the names and designations of all my hereafter to appear in some future edition of your work perhaps half a century hence, you must certainly include *The bonniest lass in a' the world* in collection.

Daintie Davie I have heard sung nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine times, always with the chorus to the low part of the and nothing has surprised me so much a

opinion on this subject. If it will not suit as I proposed, we will lay two of the stanzas together, and then make the chorus follow.

Fee him Father. I enclose you Frazer's set of this tune when he plays it slow; in fact he makes it the language of despair. I shall here give you two stanzas in that style, merely to try if it will be any improvement. Were it possible, in singing, to give it half the pathos which Frazer gives it in playing, it would make an admirably pathetic song. I do not give these verses for any merit they have. I composed them at the time in which *Patie Allan's mither died, that was about the back o' midnight*; and by the lee-side of a bowl of punch, which had over-set every mortal in company, except the hautbois and the fūse.

* * * * *

"Thou hast left me ever, Jamie, thou hast left me ever."

Jockey and Jenny I would discard, and in its place would put *There's nae luck about the house*, which has a very pleasant air, and which is positively the finest love-ballad in that style in the Scottish, or perhaps in any other language. *When she came ben the bobbet*, as an air, is more beautiful than either, and in the *andante* way would unite with a charming sentimental ballad.

Saw ye my Father? is one of my greatest favourites. The evening before last, I wandered out, and began a tender song; in what I think is its native style. I must premise, that the old way, and the way to give most effect, is to have no starting note, as the fiddlers call it, but to burst at once into the

pathos. Every country girl sings—*Saw ye my father? &c.*

My song is but just begun; and I should like, before I proceed, to know your opinion of it. I have sprinkled it with the Scottish dialect, but it may be easily turned into correct English.*

Todlin hame. Urbani mentioned an idea of his, which has long been mine; that this air is highly susceptible of pathos: accordingly, you will soon hear him at your concert try it to a song of mine in the Museum; *Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon.* One song more and I have done: *Auld lang syne.* The air is but *mediocre*; but the following song, the old song of the olden times, and which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript, until I took it down from an old man's singing, is enough to recommend any air.

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,” &c.

Now I suppose I have tired your patience fairly. You must, after all is over, have a number of ballads, properly so called. *Gill Morice, Tranent Muir, M'Pherson's Farewell, Battle of Sheriff Muir, or We ran and they ran* (I know the author of this charming ballad, and his history), *Hardiknute, Barbara Allan* (I can furnish a finer set of this tune than any that has yet appeared), and besides, do you know that I really have the old tune to which *The Cherry and the Slae* was sung; and which is mentioned as a well known air in Scotland's Complaint,

* “Where are the joys I hae met in the morning,” &c.

book published before poor Mary's days. It was then called *The banks o' Helicon*; an old poem which Pinkerton has brought to light. You will see all this in Tytler's history of Scottish music. The tune, to a learned ear, may have no great merit: but it is a great curiosity. I have a good many original things of this kind.

CXXXV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

AM happy, my dear sir, that my ode pleases you so much. Your idea, "honour's bed," is, though beautiful, a hackneyed idea; so, if you please, I will let the line stand as it is. I have altered the song as follows.*

N. B. I have borrowed the last stanza from the common stall edition of Wallace.

"A false usurper sinks in every foe,
And liberty returns with every blow."

A couplet worthy of Homer. Yesterday you had enough of my correspondence. The post goes, and my head aches miserably. One comfort!—I suffer so much just now in this world, for last night's mortality, that I shall escape scot-free for it in the world to come. Amen.

* "Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled," &c.

CXXXVI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

"Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" My ode pleases me so much that I cannot alter it. Your proposed alterations would, in my opinion, make it tame. I am exceedingly obliged to you for putting me on reconsidering it; as I think I have much improved it. Instead of "soger! hero!" I will have it "Calédonian! on wi' me!"

I have scrutinized it over and over; and to the world some way or other it shall go as it is. At the same time it will not in the least hurt me, should you leave it out altogether, and adhere to your first intention of adopting Logan's verses.*

I have finished my song to *Saw ye my Father?* and in English, as you will see. That there is a syllable too much for the *expression* of the air, is true; but allow me to say, that the mere dividing of a dotted crotchet into a crotchet and a quaver, is not a great matter: however, in that I have no pretensions to cope in judgment with you. Of the poetry I speak with confidence; but the music is a

* Mr. Thomson has very properly adopted this song (if it may be so called) as the bard presented it to him. He has attached it to the air of *Lewie Gordon*, and perhaps among the existing airs he could not find a better; but the poetry is suited to a much higher strain of music, and may employ the genius of some Scottish Handel, if any such should in future arise.

business where I hint my ideas with the utmost diffidence.

The old verses have merit, though unequal, and are popular: my advice is, to set the air to the old words, and let mine follow as English verses. Here they are—

“Where are the joys I have met in the morning,” &c.

Adieu my dear sir! The post goes, so I shall defer some other remarks until more leisure.

CXXXVII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

I HAVE been turning over some volumes of songs, to find verses whose measures would suit the airs, for which you have allotted me to find English songs.

For *Muirland Willie*, you have, in Ramsay's Teatable, an excellent song, beginning, “Ah! why those tears in Nelly's eyes?” As for *The Collier's Tochter*, take the following old Bacchanal.

“Deluded swain, the pleasure,” &c.

The faulty line in Logan-Water, I mend thus:

“How can your flinty hearts enjoy,
The widow's tears, the orphan's cry?”

The song otherwise will pass. As to *M' Gregoira Rua-Ruth*, you will see a song of mine to it, with a

set of the air superior to yours, in the Museum, vol. ii. p. 181. The song begins,

“ Raving winds around her blowing.”

Your Irish airs are pretty, but they are downright Irish. If they were like the *Banks of Banna*, for instance, though really Irish, yet in the Scottish taste, you might adopt them. Since you are so fond of Irish music, what say you to twenty-five of them in an additional number? We could easily find this quantity of charming airs: I will take care that you shall not want songs; and I assure you that you would find it the most saleable of the whole. If you do not approve of *Roy's Wife*, for the music's sake, we shall not insert it. *Deil tak the wars*, is a charming song; so is, *Saw ye my Peggy? There's nae luck about the house*, well deserves a place. I cannot say that, *O'er the hills and far awa*, strikes me as equal to your selection. *This is no my ain house*, is a great favourite air of mine; and if you will send me your set of it, I will task my muse to her highest effort. What is your opinion of *I hae laid a herrin in sawt*? I like it much. Your Jacobite airs are pretty; and there are many others of the same kind, pretty; but you have not room for them. You cannot, I think, insert *Fie, let us a' to the bridal*, to any other words than its own.

What pleases me, as simple and naïve, disgusts you as ludicrous and low. For this reason, *Fie, gie me my coggie, Sirs—Fie, let us a' to the bridal*, with several others of that cast, are to me highly pleasing; while, *Saw ye my Father, or saw ye my Mother?* delights me with its descriptive simple pathos. Thus my song, *Ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has*

"? pleases myself so much, that I cannot try
and at another song to the air; so I shall not
opt it. I know you will laugh at all this; but,
sa man wears his belt his ain gait."

CXXXVIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

October, 1793.

My last letter, my dear Thomson, was indeed
filled with heavy news. Alas, poor Erskine!* The
information that he was a coadjutor in your publi-
cation, has till now scared me from writing to you,
turning my thoughts on composing for you.
I am pleased that you are reconciled to the air of
Quaker's Wife; though, by the bye, an old
Glasgow gentleman, and a deep antiquarian, tells
it is a Gaelic air, and known by the name of
Er m' choss. The following verses, I hope, will
please you, as an English song to the air.

"Thine am I, my faithful fair," &c.

My objection to the English song I proposed
John Anderson my jo, is certainly just. The
original is by an old acquaintance of mine, and I
think has merit. The song was never in print,
which I think is so much in your favour. The
original good poetry your collection contains,
certainly has so much the more merit.

The honourable A. Erskine, brother to Lord Kelly.

O, condescend, dear charming
My wretched state to view
A tender swain to love betray
And sad despair, by you.

While here, all melancholy,
My passion I deplore,
Yet, urged by stern, resistless
I love thee more and more

I heard of love; and with disdain
The urchin's power denied
I laugh'd at every lover's pain
And mock'd them when they tried

But how my state is alter'd!
Those happy days are o'er
For all thy unrelenting hate
I love thee more and more

O, yield, illustrious beauty,
No longer let me mourn;
And though victorious in the field
Thy captive do not scorn

Let generous pity warm the breast
My wonted peace restore;
And, grateful, I shall bless the power
And love thee more and more

mand, if you like his manner. Possibly, as he is an old friend of mine, I may be prejudiced in his favour ; but I like some of his pieces very much.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

BY GAVIN TURNBULL.

Thou sweetest minstrel of the grove,
That ever tried the plaintive strain,
Awake thy tender tale of love,
And soothe a poor forsaken swain.

For though the muses deign to aid,
And teach him smoothly to complain ;
Yet Delia, charming, cruel maid,
Is deaf to her forsaken swain.

All day, with fashion's gaudy sons,
In sport she wanders o'er the plain ;
Their tales approves, and still she shuns
The notes of her forsaken swain.

When evening shades obscure the sky,
And bring the solemn hours again,
Begin, sweet bird, thy melody,
And soothe a poor forsaken swain.

I shall just transcribe another of Turnbull's, which would go charmingly to *Lewie Gordon*.

LAURA.

BY GAVIN TURNBULL.

Let me wander where I will,
By shady wood, or winding rill ;
Where the sweetest May-born flowers
Paint the meadows, deck the bowers ;

BURNS'S LETTERS.

Where the linnet's early song
Echoes sweet the woods among ;
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

If at rosy dawn I choose
To indulge the smiling muse ;
If I court some cool retreat,
To avoid the noon-tide heat ;
If, beneath the moon's pale ray,
Through unfrequented wilds I stray ;
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

When at night the drowsy god
Waves his sleep-compelling rod,
And to fancy's wakeful eyes
Bids celestial visions rise ;
While with boundless joy I rove
Through the fairy-land of love ;
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

he rest of your letter I shall answer at some
r opportunity.

CXXXIX.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.

December, 1793.

IR,
s said that we take the greatest liberties with
greatest friends, and I pay myself a very high
pliment in the manner in which I am going to
y the remark. I have owed you money longer
ever I owed it to any man.—Here is Ker's ac-

count, and here are six guineas; and now, I don't owe a shilling to man—or woman either. But for these damned dirty, dog's-ear'd little pages,* I had done myself the honour to have waited on you long ago. Independent of the obligations your hospitality has laid me under; the consciousness of your superiority in the rank of man and gentleman, of itself was fully as much as I could ever make head against; but to owe you money too, was more than I could face.

I think I once mentioned something of a collection of Scots songs I have some years been making: I send you a perusal of what I have got together. I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, and five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice you. A very few of them are my own. When you are tired of them, please leave them with Mr. Clint, of the King's Arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world; and I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a good deal of pains.

CXL.

TO MRS. R

*Who was to bespeak a Play one Evening at the
Dumfries Theatre.*

I AM thinking to send my *Address* to some periodical publication, but it has not got your sanction, so pray look over it.

* Scottish Bank Notes.

As to the Tuesday's play, let me beg of you, my dear madam, to give us, *The Wonder, a Woman keeps a Secret!* to which please add, *The Spoilt Child*—you will highly oblige me by so doing.

Ah! what an enviable creature you are! There now, this cursed gloomy blue-devil day, you are going to a party of choice spirits—

“ To play the shapes
Of frolic fancy, and incessant form
Those rapid pictures, that assembled train
Of fleet ideas, never join'd before,
Where lively wit excites to gay surprise;
Or folly-painting *humour*, grave himself,
Calls laughter forth, deep-shaking every nerve.”

But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend.

CXLI.

To a Lady, in favour of a Player's Benefit.

MADAM,

You were so very good as to promise me to honour my friend with your presence on his benefit-night. That night is fixed for Friday first: the play a most interesting one! *The Way to keep Him*. I have the pleasure to know Mr. G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honour to patronage: he is a poor and modest man; claims which from their very *silence* have the more forcible power on the generous heart. Alas, for pity! that from the in-

dolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen-fronted importunity snatch that boon, the rightful due of retiring, humble want ! Of all the qualities we assign to the Author and Director of Nature, by far the most enviable is—to be able “to wipe away all tears from all eyes.” O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent *mausoleums*, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor honest heart happy !

But I crave your pardon, madam ; I came to beg, not to preach.

CXLII.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER

TO MR. . . .

1794.

I AM extremely obliged to you for your kind mention of my interests, in a letter which Mr. S * * * showed me. At present, my situation in life must be in a great measure stationary, at least for two or three years. The statement is this—I am on the supervisor's list ; and as we come on there by precedence, in two or three years I shall be at the head of that list, and be appointed *of course*—then, a friend might be of service to me in getting me into a place of the kingdom which I would like. A supervisor's income varies from about a hundred and twenty, to two hundred a-year ; but the business is an incessant drudgery, and would be nearly

a complete bar to every species of literary *pursuit*. The moment I am appointed supervisor in the common routine, I may be nominated on the collectors list; and this is always a business purely of political patronage. A collectorship varies much from better than two hundred a-year to near a thousand. They also come forward by precedency on the list, and have, besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure, with a decent competence, is the summit of my wishes. It would be the prudish affectation of silly pride in me, to say that I do not need, or would not be indebted to a political friend; at the same time, sir, I by no means lay my affairs before you thus, to hook my dependent situation on your benevolence. If, in my progress of life, an opening should occur where the good offices of a gentleman of your public character and political consequence might bring me forward, I will petition your goodness with the same frankness and sincerity as I now do myself the honour to subscribe myself, &c.

CXLIII.

TO MRS. R

DEAR MADAM,

I MEANT to have called on you yesternight; but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view was one of those lobster-coated puppies, sitting like another dragon, guarding the Hesperian fruit. On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my weather-beaten rustic phiz a part of your box-

niture on Tuesday, when we may arrange the business of the visit.

* * * * *

Among the profusion of idle compliments, which sordid craft, or unmeaning folly, incessantly offer your shrine—a shrine, how far exalted above all adoration!—permit me, were it but for rarity's sake, to pay you the honest tribute of a warm heart and an independent mind; and to assure you that I am, thou most amiable, and most accomplished of thy sex, with the most respectful esteem, and warmest regard, thine, &c.

CXLIV.

TO THE SAME.

I WILL wait on you, my ever-valued friend, but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our cursed revenue business, and I may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen! There is a species of the human genus that I call *the gin-house class*: what enviable dogs they are! Round, and round, and round they go.—Mundell's ox, that drives his cotton-mill, is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented; while I sit, altogether Novemberish, a d—melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to remove me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch caught amid

the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—"And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!" If my resentment is awakened, it is sure to be where it dare not squeak; and if—

* * * * *

Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of

R. B.

CXLV.

TO THE SAME.

I HAVE this moment got the song from S * * *, and I am sorry to see that he has spoilt it a good deal. It shall be a lesson to me how I lend him any thing again.

I have sent you *Werter*, truly happy to have any, the smallest opportunity of obliging you.

'Tis true, madam, I saw you once since I was at W * * * ; and that once froze the very life-blood of my heart. Your reception of me was such, that a wretch meeting the eye of his judge, about to pronounce sentence of death on him, could only have envied my feelings and situation. But I hate the theme, and never more shall write or speak on it.

One thing I shall proudly say, that I can pay Mrs. * * * a higher tribute of esteem, and appreciate her amiable worth more truly, than any man whom I have seen approach her.

CXLVI.

TO THE SAME.

I HAVE often told you, my dear friend, that you had a spice of caprice in your composition, and you have as often disavowed it: even, perhaps, while your opinions were, at the moment, irrefragably proving it. Could *any thing* estrange me from a friend such as you?—No! To-morrow I shall have the honour of waiting on you.

Farewell, thou first of friends, and most accomplished of women; even with all thy little caprices!

CXLVII.

TO THE SAME.

MADAM,

I RETURN your common-place book: I have perused it with much pleasure, and would have continued my criticisms; but as it seems the critic has forfeited your esteem, his strictures must lose their value.

If it is true that “offences come only from the heart,” before you I am guiltless. To admire, esteem, and prize you, as the most accomplished of women, and the first of friends—if these are crimes, I am the most offending thing alive.

In a face where I used to meet the kind complacency of friendly confidence, *now* to find cold neglect and contemptuous scorn—is a wrench that my heart can ill bear. It is, however, some kind of

miserable good luck, that while *de haut-en-bas* rigour may depress an unoffending wretch to the ground, it has a tendency to rouse a stubborn something in his bosom, which, though it cannot heal the wounds of his soul, is at least an opiate to blunt their poignancy.

With the profoundest respect for your abilities; the most sincere esteem and ardent regard for your gentle heart and amiable manners; and the most fervent wish and prayer for your welfare, peace, and bliss, I have the honour to be, madam, your most devoted humble servant.

CXLVIII.

TO JOHN SYME, ESQ.

You know that, among other high dignities, you have the honour to be my supreme court of critical judicature, from which there is no appeal. I enclose you a song which I composed since I saw you, and I am going to give you the history of it. Do you know, that among much that I admire in the characters and manners of those great folks whom I have now the honour to call my acquaintances, the O * * * family, there is nothing charms me more than Mr. O.'s unconcealable attachment to that incomparable woman. Did you ever, my dear Syme, meet with a man who owed more to the Divine Giver of all good things than Mr. O.? A fine fortune, a pleasing exterior, self-evident amiable dispositions, and an ingenuous upright mind, and that informed, too, much beyond the usual run of young

fellows of his rank and fortune; and to all this, such a woman!—but of her I shall say nothing at all, in despair of saying any thing adequate. In my song, I have endeavoured to do justice to what would be his feelings, on seeing, in the scene I have drawn, the habitation of his Lucy. As I am a good deal pleased with my performance, I in my first fervour, thought of sending it to Mrs. O * * * ; but on second thoughts, perhaps what I offer as the honest incense of genuine respect, might, from the well-known character of poverty and poetry, be construed into some modification or other of that servility which my soul abhors.*

CXLIX.

TO MISS * * * *

MADAM,

NOTHING short of a kind of absolute necessity could have made me trouble you with this letter. Except my ardent and just esteem for your sense, taste, and worth, every sentiment arising in my breast, as I put pen to paper to you, is painful. The scenes I have past with the friend of my soul and his amiable connexions! the wrench at my heart to think that he is gone, for ever gone from me, never more to meet in the wanderings of a weary world! and the cutting reflection of all, that I had most unfortunately, though most undeservedly, lost the confidence of that soul of worth, ere it took its flight!

* The song enclosed was—"O wat ye wha's in yon town?"

These, madam, are sensations of no ordinary kind.—However, you also may be offended by some *imputed* improprieties of mine; as you know I possess, and sincerity none.

To oppose those prejudices which have been raised against me, is not the business of a poet. Indeed it is a warfare I know not how to wage. The powers of positive vice I can in some degree calculate, and against direct malevolence I am on my guard; but who can estimate the giddy caprice, or ward off the unthinking of precipitate folly?

I have a favour to request of you, madam, for your sister Mrs. * * *, through your mediation, to know that, at the wish of my late friend, I have a collection of all my trifles in verse which I have written. There are many of them local, and some of them puerile and silly, and all of them unworthy the public eye. As I have some little fame, and a fame that I trust may live when the hat of the world who "watch for my halting," and the sneer of those whom accident has made ridiculous, will, with themselves, be gone to the land of oblivion; I am uneasy now for the fate of my manuscripts.—Will Mrs. * * * have the goodness to destroy them, or return them to me? As they were bestowed by the friendship of those to whom they were bestowed; and the circumstance indeed was all their merit. Most grateful to me, that merit they no longer possess. I hope that Mrs. * * * 's goodness, which I know, and ever will revere, will not refuse me the favour to a man whom she once held in a high degree of estimation.

With the sincerest esteem, I have the honour to be, madam, &c.

CL.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

25th February, 1794.

CANST thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tossed on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Canst thou give to a frame, tremblingly alive as the tortures of suspense, the stability and hardihood of the rock that braves the blast? If thou canst not do the least of these, why wouldst thou disturb me in my miseries with thy inquiries after me?

* * * * *

For these two months I have not been able to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were, *ab origine*, blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria, which poisons my existence. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these * * * * * times; losses which, though trifling, were yet what I could ill bear, have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be en-
vied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.

Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. *A heart at ease* would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the Gospel: he might

melt and mould the hearts of those around him, his own kept its native incorrigibility.

Still there are two great pillars that bear amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The first is composed of the different modifications of certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The other is made up of those feelings and sentiments which, however the sceptic may deny them, the enthusiast disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human mind, those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link together those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful, equally beneficent God; and a world to come beyond death and the grave. The first gives the ray of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the last—the last pours the balm of comfort into wounds which time can never cure.

I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion. I know some who laugh at it, as the trick of a crafty FEW, to lead the undiscerning MANY into most as an uncertain obscurity, which many never know any thing of, and with which the fools, if they give themselves much to do with, would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion, more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what he and to others, were such superlative sources of joyment. It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of my child of mine with religion. If my son should prove to be a man of feeling, sentiment, and

shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow, who is just now running about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart; and an imagination, delighted with the painter, and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him wandering out in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales, and enjoy the growing luxuriance of the spring; himself the while in the blooming youth of life. He looks abroad on all nature, and through nature up to nature's God. His soul, by swift delighting degrees, is rapt above this sublunary sphere, until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson,

“ These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God.— The rolling year
Is full of thee.”

And so on in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn.

These are no ideal pleasures: they are real delights; and I ask what of the delights among the sons of men are superior, not to say equal, to them? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious Virtue stamps them for her own; and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God.

CL1.

TO MRS. R.

*Supposes himself to be writing from the L
Living.*

MADAM,

I DARE say this is the first epistle you ever from this nether world. I write you from regions of Hell, amid the horrors of the dark time and manner of my leaving your earth exactly know, as I took my departure in a fever of intoxication, contracted at your table mansion; but, on my arrival here, I tried, and sentenced to endure the purgations of this infernal confine for the space nine years, eleven months, and twenty- and all on account of the impropriety of conduct yesternight under your roof. Here on a bed of pitiless furze, with my aching reclined on a pillow of ever-piercing thorn infernal tormentor, wrinkled, and old, and name I think is *Recollection*, with a whisper, forbids peace or rest to approach keeps anguish eternally awake. Still, I could in any measure be reinstated in the union of the fair circle whom my conduct so much injured, I think it would be an relief to my torments. For this reason I trouble this letter. To the men of the company I make no apology.—Your husband, who insists on drinking more than I chose, has no right

me ; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt. But to you, madam, I have much to apologize. Your good opinion I valued as one of the greatest acquisitions I had made on earth, and I was truly a beast to forfeit it. There was a Miss I***, too, a woman of fine sense, gentle and unassuming manners—do make, on my part, a miserable d—d wretch's best apology to her. A Mrs. G*****, a charming woman, did me the honour to be prejudiced in my favour ; this makes me hope that I have not outraged her beyond all forgiveness.—To all the other ladies please present my humblest contrition for my conduct, and my petition for their gracious pardon. O, all ye powers of decency and decorum ! whisper to them, that my errors, though great, were involuntary—that an intoxicated man is the vilest of beasts—that it was not in my nature to be brutal to any one—that to be rude to a woman, when in my senses, was impossible with me—but—

* * * * *

Regret ! Remorse ! Shame ! ye three hell-hounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels, spare me ! spare me !

Forgive the offences, and pity the perdition of, madam, your humble slave.

CLII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

May, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,
I RETURN you the plates, with which I am highly

pleased ; I would humbly propose, instead of the younker knitting stockings, to put a stock and horn into his hands. A friend of mine, who is positively the ablest judge on the subject I have ever met with, and though an unknown, is yet a superior artist with the *Burin*, is quite charmed with Allan's manner. I got him a peep of the *Gentle Shepherd*; and he pronounces Allan a most original artist of great excellence.

For my part, I look on Mr. Allan's choosing my favourite poem for his subject, to be one of the highest compliments I have ever received.

I am quite vexed at Pleyel's being cooped up in France, as it will put an entire stop to our work. Now, and for six or seven months, *I shall be quite in song*, as you shall see by-and-by. I got an air, pretty enough, composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron, of Heron, which she calls *The Banks of Cree*. Cree is a beautiful romantic stream ; and as her ladyship is a particular friend of mine, I have written the following song to it :

“ Here is the glen, and here the bower,” &c.

CLIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

July, 1794.

Is there no news yet of Pleyel ? Or is your work to be at a dead stop, until the allies set our modern Orpheus at liberty from the savage thralldom of democratic discords ? Alas the day ! And woe is me !

That auspicious period, pregnant with the happiness of millions.*—* * * * *

I have presented a copy of your songs to the daughter of a much-valued and much-honoured friend of mine, Mr. Graham, of Fintry. I wrote on the blank side of the title-page the following address to the young lady :

“ Here, where the Scottish Muse immortal lives,” &c.

CLIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

30th August, 1794.

THE last evening, as I was straying out, and thinking of *O'er the hills and far away*, I spun the following stanza for it ; but whether my spinning will deserve to be laid up in store, like the precious thread of the silk-worm, or brushed to the devil, like the vile manufacture of the spider, I leave, my dear sir, to your usual candid criticism. I was pleased with several lines in it at first : but I own that now it appears rather a flimsy business.

This is just a hasty sketch, until I see whether it be worth a critique. We have many sailor songs, but as far as I at present recollect, they are mostly the effusions of the jovial sailor, not the wailings of his love-lorn mistress. I must here make one sweet exception—*Sweet Annie frae the sea-beach came*. Now for the song.

“ How can my poor heart be glad,” &c.

* A portion of this letter has been left out, for reasons that will be easily imagined.

I give you leave to abuse this song, but do in spirit of Christian meekness.

CLV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

Sep

I SHALL withdraw my, *On the seas and fa* altogether : it is unequal, and unworthy th
Making a poem is like begetting a son : you
know whether you have a wise man or a fo
you produce him to the world to try him.

For that reason I send you the offspring
brain, *abortions* and all ; and, as such, p
over them, and forgive them, and burn then
flattered at your adopting *Ca' the yowe*
knowes, as it was owing to me that ever it
light. About seven years ago I was well ac
with a worthy little fellow of a clergyman
Clunie, who sung it charmingly ; and, at my
Mr. Clarke took it down from his singing.
I gave it to Johnson, I added some stanza
song, and mended others, but still it will no
you. In a solitary stroll which I took I
tried my hand on a few pastoral lines, follo
the idea of the chorus, which I would
Here it is, with all its crudities and imper
on its head.

“ Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them whare the heather growes,
Ca' them whare the burnie rowes,
My bonnie dearie.

“ Hark, the mavis' evening sang,” &c.

shall give you my opinion of your other newly
 ed songs my first scribbling fit.

CLVI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

Sept. 1794.

ou know a blackguard Irish song, called *Onagh's
 r-fall?* The air is charming, and I have often
 tted the want of decent verses to it. It is too
 , at least for my humble rustic muse, to ex-
 hat every effort of hers shall have merit; still
 nk that it is better to have mediocre verses to
 úrite air, than none at all. On this principle
 e all along proceeded in the Scots Musical
 um; and as that publication is at its last vo-
 , I intend the following song, to the air above-
 ioned, for that work.

It does not suit you as an editor, you may be
 ed to have verses to it that you can sing before
 s.

“Sae flaxen were her ringlets,” &c.

ot to compare small things with great, my taste
 sic is like the mighty Frederick of Prussia's
 in painting: we are told that he frequently
 red what the connoisseurs decried, and al-
 without any hypocrisy confessed his admira-

I am sensible that my taste in music must be
 rant and vulgar, because people of undisputed
 ultivated taste can find no merit in my fa-
 te tunes. Still, because I am cheaply pleased,
 at any reason why I should deny myself that
 ure? Many of our strathspeys, ancient and
 ru, give me most exquisite enjoyment, where

you and other judges would probably be showing disgust. For instance, I am just now making verses for *Rothemurche's Rant*, an air which puts me in raptures; and in fact, unless I be pleased with the tune, I never can make verses to it. Here I have Clarke on my side, who is a judge that I will pit against any of you. *Rothemurche*, he says, is an air both original and beautiful; and on his recommendation, I have taken the first part of the tune for a chorus, and the fourth or last part for the song. I am but two stanzas deep in the work, and possibly you may think, and justly, that the poetry is as little worth your attention as the music.

I have begun anew, *Let me in this ae night*. Do you think that we ought to retain the old chorus? I think we must retain both the old chorus and the first stanza of the old song. I do not altogether like the third line of the first stanza, but cannot alter it to please myself. I am just three stanzas deep in it. Would you have the *denouement* to be successful or otherwise? should she "let him in," or not?

Did you not once propose *The Sow's Tail to Geordie*, as an air for your work? I am quite delighted with it; but I acknowledge that is no mark of its real excellence. I once set about verses for it, which I meant to be in the alternate way of a lover and his mistress chanting together. I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Thomson's Christian name, and yours I am afraid is rather burlesque for sentiment, else I had meant to have made you the hero and heroine of the little piece.

How do you like the following epigram, which I wrote the other day on a lovely young girl's recovery from a fever? Doctor Maxwell was the phy-

sician who seemingly, saved her from the grave ;
and to him I address the following :

Maxwell, if merit here you crave,
That merit I deny:
You save fair Jessy from the grave?—
An angel could not die.

God grant you patience with this stupid epistle !

CLVII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

19th October, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

By this morning's post I have your list, and, in general, I highly approve of it. I shall, at more leisure give you a critique on the whole. Clarke goes to your town by to-day's Fly, and I wish you would call on him and take his opinion in general : you know his taste is a standard. He will return here again in a week or two ; so, please do not miss asking for him. One thing I hope he will do, persuade you to adopt my favourite, *Craigie-burn-Wood*, in your selection : it is as great a favourite of his as of mine. The lady on whom it was made is one of the finest women in Scotland ; and in fact (*entre nous*) is in a manner to me, what Sterne's Eliza was to him—a mistress, or friend, or what you will, in the guileless simplicity of Platonic love. (Now don't put any of your squinting constructions on this, or have any clishmaclavier about it among our acquaintances.) I assure you that to my lovely friend you are indebted for many of your best songs

of mine. Do you think that the sober gin-horse routine of existence could inspire a man with life, and love, and joy—could fire him with enthusiasm, or melt him with pathos, equal to the genius of your book? No! no!—Whenever I want to be more than ordinary *in song*; to be in some degree equal to your diviner airs; do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? *Tout au contraire!* I have a glorious recipe; the very one that for his own use was invented by the divinity of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus. I put myself in a regimen of admiring a fine woman; and in proportion to the adorability of her charms, in proportion you are delighted with my verses. The lightning of her eye is the godhead of Parnassus; and the witchery of her smile the divinity of Helicon!

To descend to business; if you like my idea of *When she cam ben she bobbit*, the following stanza of mine, altered a little from what they were formerly when set to another air, may perhaps do instead of worse stanzas.

“ O, saw ye my dear, my Phely?” &c.

Now for a few miscellaneous remarks. *The Postie* (in the Museum) is my composition; the air was taken down from Mrs. Burns's voice. It is well known in the West Country, but the old words are trash. By the bye, take a look at the tune again, and tell me if you do not think it is the original from which *Roslin Castle* is composed. The second part, in particular, for the first two or three bars, is ex-

actly the old air. *Strathallan's Lament* is mine ; the music is by our right trusty and deservedly well-beloved Allan Masterton. *Donocht-Head* is not mine ; I would give ten pounds it were. It appeared first in the *Edinburgh Herald* ; and came to the editor of that paper with the *Newcastle post-mark* on it.* *Whistle o'er the lave o't* is mine : the

* The reader will be curious to see this poem, so highly praised by Burns.

Keen blows the wind o'er Donocht-Head,*

The snaw drives snelly thro' the dale ;

The Gaber-lunsie tirls my sneck,

And, shivering, tells his waeft' tale :

“ Cauld is the night, O let me in,

And dinna let your minstrel fa ;

And dinna let his winding-sheet

Be naething but a wreath o' snaw.

“ Full ninety winters hae I seen,

And piped where gor-cocks whirring flew ;

And mony a day I've danced, I ween,

To lilt which from my drone I blew.”

My Eppie waked, and soon she cried,

“ Get up, guid man, and let him in ;

For weel ye ken the winter night

Was short when he began his din.”

My Eppie's voice, o wow it's sweet,

Even tho' she bans and scaulds a wee

But when it's tuned to sorrow's tale,

O, haith, its doubly dear to me !

Come in, auld carl, I'll steer my fire,

I'll make it bleeze a bonnie flame :

* A mountain in the North.

ple here, is believed to be the author.
Andrew and his cutty Gun. The so
this is set in the Museum is mine, ar
posed on Miss Euphemia Murray, o
commonly and deservedly called the
Strathmore.

How long and dreary is the Night!
some such words in a collection of songs
which I altered and enlarged; and to
and to suit your favourite air, I have ta
or two across my room, and have arran
as you will find on the other page.

“ How long and dreary is the night,

Tell me how you like this; I diffe
idea of the expression of the tune. The
a great deal of tenderness in it. Yo

Your bluid is thin, ye've tint the gate,
Ye should nae stray sae far frae han

my opinion, dispense with a bass to your addenda airs. A lady of my acquaintance, a noted performer, plays and sings at the same time so charmingly, that I shall never bear to see any of her songs sent into the world, as naked as Mr. What-d'ye-call-um has done in his London collection.*

These English songs gravel me to death. I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue. I have been at *Duncan Gray*, to dress it in English, but all I can do is deplorably stupid. For instance :

“ Let not woman e'er complain,” &c.

Since the above, I have been out in the country, taking a dinner with a friend, where I met with the lady whom I mentioned in the second page in this odds-and-ends of a letter. As usual I got *into song* : and returning home, I composed the following :

“ Sleep'st thou, or wak'st thou, fairest creature,” &c.

If you honour my verses by setting the air to them, I will vamp up the old song, and make it English enough to be understood.

I enclose you a musical curiosity, an East Indian air, which you would swear was a Scottish one. I know the authenticity of it, as the gentleman who brought it over is a particular acquaintance of mine. Do preserve me the copy I send you, as it is the only one I have. Clarke has set a bass to it, and I intend putting it into the Musical Museum. Here follow the verses I intend for it.

• Mr. Ritson.

" But lately seen in gladsome green," &c.

I would be obliged to you if you would procure me a sight of Ritson's collection of English songs, which you mention in your letter. I will thank you for another information, and that as speedily as you please : whether this miserable drawling hotchpotch epistle has not completely tired you of my correspondence ?

CLVIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

November, 1794.

MANY thanks to you, my dear sir, for your present : it is a book of the utmost importance to me. I have yesterday begun my anecdotes, &c. for your work. I intend drawing it up in the form of a letter to you, which will save me from the tedious, dull business of systematic arrangement. Indeed, as all I have to say consists of unconnected remarks, anecdotes, scraps of old songs, &c., it would be impossible to give the work a beginning, a middle, and an end, which the critics insist to be absolutely necessary in a work. In my last I told you my objections to the song you had selected for *My lodging is on the cold ground*. On my visit the other day to my fair Chloris (that is the poetic name of the lovely goddess of my inspiration), she suggested an idea, which I, in my return from the visit, wrought into the following song :

" My Chloris, mark how green the groves," &c.

How do you like the simplicity and tenderness of this pastoral? I think it pretty well.

I like you for entering so candidly and so kindly into the story of *Ma chere amie*. I assure you I was never more in earnest in my life, than in the account of that affair which I sent you in my last. — Conjugal love is a passion which I deeply feel, and highly venerate: but, somehow, it does not make such a figure in poesy as that other species of the passion,

“ Where Love is liberty, and Nature law.”

Musically speaking, the first is an instrument of which the gamut is scanty and confined, but the tones inexpressibly sweet; while the last has powers equal to all the intellectual modulations of the human soul. Still I am a very poet in my enthusiasm of the passion. The welfare and happiness of the beloved object is the first and inviolate sentiment that pervades my soul; and whatever pleasures I might wish for, or whatever might be the raptures they would give me, yet, if they interfere with that first principle, it is having these pleasures at a dishonest price; and justice forbids, and generosity disdains the purchase! * * * * *

Despairing of my own powers to give you variety enough in English songs, I have been turning over old collections, to pick out songs, of which the measure is something similar to what I want; and, with a little alteration, so as to suit the rhythm of the air exactly, to give you them for your work. Where the songs have hitherto been but little noticed, nor have ever been set to music, I think the

shift a fair 'one. A song, which, under the same first verse, you will find in Ramsay's 'Tea-Table Miscellany, I have cut down for an English dress to your *Daintie Davie*, as follows :

“ It was the charming month of May,” &c.

You may think meanly of this, but take a look at the bombast original, and you will be surprised that I have made so much of it. I have finished my son to *Rothemurche's Rant*; and you have Clarke to consult as to the set of the air for singing.

Chorus.—“ Lassie wi' the lint-white locks,” &c.

This piece has at least the merit of being a regular pastoral: the vernal morn, the summer noon, the autumnal evening, and the winter night, all regularly rounded. If you like it, well: if not, will insert it in the Museum.

I am out of temper that you should set so sweet so tender an air, as *Deil tak the Wars*, to the foolish old verses. You talk of the silliness of *Saw ye n Father?* by heavens! the odds is gold to brass. Besides, the old song, though now pretty well modernized into the Scottish language, is originally and in the early editions, a bungling low imitation of the Scottish manner, by that genius 'To D'Urfey; so has no pretensions to be a Scottish production. There is a pretty English song, Sheridan, in the *Duenna*, to this air, which is of sight, superior to D'Urfey's. It begins,

“ When sable night each drooping plant restoring.”

The air, if I understand the expression of it properly, is the very native language of simplicity, tenderness, and love. I have again gone over my song to the tune as follows.

Now for my English song to *Nancy's to the greenwood, &c.*

“ Farewell, thou stream that winding flows,” &c.

There is an air, *The Caledonian Hunt's Delight*, to which I wrote a song that you will find in Johnson.

Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon; this air, I think, might find a place among your hundred, as Lear says of his knights. Do you know the history of the air? It is curious enough. A good many years ago, Mr. James Miller, writer in your good town, a gentleman whom possibly you know, was in company with our friend Clarke; and talking of Scottish music, Miller expressed an ardent ambition to be able to compose a Scots air. Mr. Clarke, partly by way of joke, told him to keep to the black keys of the harpsichord, and preserve some kind of rhythm, and he would infallibly compose a Scots air. Certainly it is, that in a few days Mr. Miller produced the rudiments of an air, which Mr. Clarke, with some touches and corrections, fashioned into the tune in question. Ritson, you know, has the same story of the *Black Keys*; but this account which I have just given you, Mr. Clarke informed me of several years ago. Now to show you how difficult it is to trace the origin of our airs, I have heard it repeatedly asserted that this was an Irish air; nay, I met with an Irish gentleman who affirmed he had heard it in Ireland among the old

cult then to ascertain the truth re
and music! I myself have lately
ballads sung through the streets
my name at the head of them as t
it was the first time I had ever se

I thank you for admitting *Cr*
and I shall take care to furnish
chorus. In fact the chorus was
a part of some old verses to the a
myself in a more than ordinari
ment, I shall write a new *Craigie*
gether. My heart is much in the

I am ashamed, my dear fellow
quest; 'tis dunning your genero
ment, when I had forgotten wher
poor, I promised Chloris a copy o
wings my honest pride to write
ungracious request is doubly so
logy. To make you some ame
have extracted the necessary
them, I will return you Ritson's

CLIX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

19th November, 1794.

You see, my dear sir, what a punctual correspondent I am; though indeed you may thank yourself for the *tedium* of my letters, as you have so flattered me on my horsemanship with my favourite hobby, and have praised the grace of his ambling so much, that I am scarcely ever off his back. For instance, this morning, though a keen blowing frost, in my walk before breakfast, I finished my *duet* which you were pleased to praise so much. Whether I have uniformly succeeded, I will not say; but here it is for you, though it is not an hour old.

“O Philly, happy be that day,” &c.

Tell me honestly how you like it; and point out whatever you think faulty.

I am much pleased with your idea of singing our songs in alternate stanzas, and regret that you did not hint it to me sooner. In those that remain, I shall have it in my eye. I remember your objections to the name Philly; but it is the common abbreviation of Phyllis. Sally, the only other name that suits, has to my ear a vulgarity about it, which unfits it for any thing except burlesque. The legion of Scottish poetasters of the day, whom your brother editor, Mr. Ritson, ranks with me, as my coevals, have always mistaken vulgarity for simplicity; whereas, simplicity is as much *eloignée* from vul-

garity, on the one hand, as from affected point and puerile conceit on the other.

I agree with you as to the air, *Craigie-burn-Wood*, that a chorus would in some degree spoil the effect; and shall certainly have none in my projected song to it. It is not however a case in point with *Rothemurche*; there, as in *Roy's Wife of Aldivaloch*, a chorus goes, to my taste, well enough. As to the chorus going first, that is the case with *Roy's Wife*, as well as *Rothemurche*. In fact, in the first part of both tunes, the rhythm is so peculiar and irregular, and on that irregularity depends so much of their beauty, that we must e'en take them with all their wildness, and humour the verse accordingly. Leaving out the starting note, in both tunes, has, I think, an effect, that no regularity could counter-balance the want of.

Try

{ O Roy's Wife of Aldivaloch.
 { O lassie wi' the lint-white locks.

and

Compare with,

{ *Roy's Wife* of Aldivaloch.
 { *Lassie wi'* the lint-white locks.

Does not the tameness of the prefixed syllable strike you? In the last case, with the true furor of genius, you strike at once into the wild originality of the air; whereas in the first insipid method, it is like the grating screw of the pins before the fiddle is brought into tune. This is my taste; if I am wrong, I beg pardon of the *cognoscenti*.

The Caledonian Hunt is so charming, that it would make any subject in a song go down; but pathos is certainly its native tongue. Scottish Baccha-

Italians we certainly want, though the few we have are excellent. For instance, *Todlin Hame*, is, for wit and humour, an unparalleled composition; and *Andrew and his cutty Gun*, is the work of a master. By the way, are you not quite vexed to think that those men of genius, for such they certainly were, who composed our fine Scottish lyrics, should be unknown? It has given me many a heart-ache. A-propos to Bacchanalian songs in Scottish; I composed one yesterday, for an air I like much—*Lumps o' Pudding*.

“Contented wi' little, and cantie wi' mair,” &c.

If you do not relish this air, I will send it to Johnson.

Since yesterday's penmanship, I have framed a couple of English stanzas, by way of an English song to *Roy's Wife*. You will allow me that in this instance, my English corresponds in sentiment with the Scottish.

Chorus—“Canst thou leave me thus, my Katy?” &c.

Well! I think this, to be done in two or three turns across my room, and with two or three pinches of Irish Blackguard, is not so far amiss. You see I am determined to have my quantum of applause from somebody.

Tell my friend Allan (for I am sure that we only want the trifling circumstance of being known to one another, to be the best friends on earth,) that I much suspect he has, in his plates, mistaken the figure of the stock and horn. I have, at last, gotten one; but it is a very rude instrument. It is composed of three parts; the stock, which is the hinder thigh-bone of

a sheep, such as you see in a mutton ham ; the horn, which is a common Highland cow's horn, cut off at the smaller end, until the aperture be large enough to admit the stock to be pushed up through the horn until it be held by the thicker end of the thigh-bone ; and lastly, an oaten reed exactly cut and notched like that which you see every shepherd-boy have, when the corn-stems are green and full-grown. The reed is not made fast in the bone, but is held by the lips, and plays loose in the smaller end of the stock ; while the stock, with the horn hanging on its larger end, is held by the hands in playing. The stock has six or seven ventiges on the upper side, and one back-ventige, like the common flute. This of mine was made by a man from the braes of Athole, and is exactly what the shepherds are wont to use in that country.

However, either it is not quite properly bored in the holes, or else we have not the art of blowing it rightly ; for we can make little of it. If Mr. Allan chooses, I will send him a sight of mine ; as I look on myself to be a kind of brother-brush with him. "Pride in poets is nae sin;" and I will say it, that I look on Mr. Allan and Mr. Burns to be the only genuine and real painters of Scottish costume in the world.

CLX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

December, 1794.

IT is, I assure you, the pride of my heart, to do any thing to forward, or add to the value of your book ; and as I agree with you that the Jacobite

song in the Museum, to *There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame*, would not so well consort with Peter Pindar's excellent love-song to that air, I have just framed for you the following :

" Now in her green mantle blithe nature arrays," &c.

How does this please you ? As to the point of time, for the expression, in your proposed print from my *Soger's Return*, it must certainly be at — " She gazed." The interesting dubity and suspense, taking possession of her countenance, and the gushing fondness, with a mixture of roguish playfulness in his, strike me, as things of which a master will make a great deal. In great haste, but in great truth, yours.

CLXI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

January, 1795.

I FEAR for my songs ; however a few may please, yet originality is a coy feature in composition, and in a multiplicity of efforts in the same style, disappears altogether. For these three thousand years, we, poetic folks, have been describing the spring, for instance ; and as the spring continues the same, there must soon be a sameness in the imagery, &c. of these said rhyming folks.

A great critic, Aikin, on songs, says, that love and wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing. The following is on neither subject, and consequently is no song ; but will be allowed, I think, to be two

or three pretty good prose thoughts, inverted into rhyme.

“ Is there, for honest poverty,” &c.

I do not give you the foregoing song for your book, but merely by way of *vive la bagatelle*; for the piece is not really poetry. How will the following do for *Craigie-burn-Wood*?

“ Sweet fa's the eve on Craigie-burn,” &c.

Farewell! God bless you.

CLXII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR THOMSON,

Ecclefechan, 7th Feb. 1795.

YOU cannot have any idea of the predicament in which I write to you. In the course of my duty as supervisor (in which capacity I have acted of late), I came yesternight to this unfortunate, wicked little village. I have gone forward, but snows of ten feet deep have impeded my progress; I have tried to “ gae back the gait I cam again,” but the same obstacle has shut me up within insuperable bars. To add to my misfortune, since dinner, a scraper has been torturing catgut, in sounds that would have insulted the dying agonies of a sow under the hands of a butcher; and thinks himself, on that very account, exceeding good company. In fact, I have been in a dilemma, either to get

drunk, to forget these miseries ; or to hang myself, to get rid of them ; like a prudent man (a character congenial to my every thought, word, and deed), I, of two evils, have chosen the least, and am, very drunk, at your service !

I wrote to you yesterday from Dumfries. I had not time then to tell you all I wanted to say ; and heaven knows, at present I have not capacity.

Do you know an air — I am sure you must know it, *We'll gang nae mair to yon town ?* I think, in slowish time, it would make an excellent song. I am highly delighted with it ; and if you should think it worthy of your attention, I have a fair dame in my eye to whom I would consecrate it.

As I am just going to bed, I wish you a good night.

CLXIII.

TO MR. THOMSON,

WITH TWO SONGS.

“ How cruel are the parents,” &c.

“ Mark yonder pomp of costly fashion,” &c.

Well ! this is not amiss. You see how I answer your orders : your tailor could not be more punctual. I am just now in a high fit for poetising, provided that the strait jacket of criticism don't cure me. If you can in a post or two administer a little of the intoxicating portion of your applause, it will raise your humble servant's frenzy to any height you want. I am at this moment “holding high

converse" with the Muses, and have not a word to throw away on such a prosaic dog as you are.

CLXIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

May, 1795.

TEN thousand thanks for your elegant present : though I am ashamed of the value of it being bestowed on a man who has not by any means merited such an instance of kindness. I have shown it to two or three judges of the first abilities here, and they all agree with me in classing it as a first-rate production. My phiz is *sae kenspeckle*, that the very joiner's apprentice whom Mrs. Burns employed to break up the parcel (I was out of town that day,) knew it at once.—My most grateful compliments to Allan, who has honoured my rustic muse so much with his masterly pencil. One strange coincidence is, that the little one who is making the felonious attempt on the cat's tale, is the most striking likeness of an *ill-deedie, d—n'd, wee, rumble-gairie, urchin* of mine, whom, from that propensity to witty wickedness, and manfu' mischief, which even at-twa days auld, I foresaw would form the striking features of his disposition, I named Willie Nicol, after a certain friend of mine, who is one of the masters of a grammar-school in a city which shall be nameless.

Give the enclosed epigram to my much-valued friend Cunningham, and tell him that on Wednesday I go to visit a friend of his, to whom his friendly partiality in speaking of me, in a manner intro-

duced me—I mean a well-known military and literary character, colonel Dirom.

You do not tell me how you liked my two last songs. Are they condemned?

CLXV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

IN *Whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad*, the iteration of that line is tiresome to my ear. Here goes what I think is an improvement :

O whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad;
 O whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad;
 Tho' father and mother, and a' should gae mad,
 Thy Jeany will venture wi' ye, my lad.

In fact, a fair dame at whose shrine I, the priest of the Nine, offer up the incense of Parnassus; a dame, whom the Graces have attired in witchcraft, and whom the Loves have armed with lightning; a fair one, herself the heroine of the song, insists on the amendment; and dispute her commands if you dare!

Chorus.—"O this is no my ain lassie," &c.

Do you know that you have roused the torpidity of Clarke at last? He has requested me to write three or four songs for him, which he is to set to music himself. The enclosed sheet contains two songs for him, which please to present to my valued friend Cunningham.

I enclose the sheet open, both for your inspection, and that you may copy the song, *O bonnie was yon rosy brier*. I do not know whether I am right; but that song pleases me; and as it is extremely probable that Clarke's newly roused celestial spark will be soon smothered in the fogs of indolence, if you like the song, it may go as Scottish verses, to the air of *I wish my love was in a mire*; and poor Erskine's English lives may follow.

I enclose you, a *For a' that and a' that*, which was never in print; it is a much superior song to mine. I have been told that it was composed by a lady.

• • • • •

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM,

WITH TWO SONGS.

" Now spring has clad the grove in green," &c.

" O bonnie was yon rosy brier," &c.

Written on the blank leaf of a copy of the last edition of my poems, presented to the lady, whom, in so many fictitious reveries of passion, but with the most ardent sentiments of real friendship, I have so often sung under the name of Chloris.

" 'Tis friendship's pledge, my young, fair friend," &c.

See *Poems*.

Une bagatelle de l' amitié. COILA.

CLXVI.

TO MR. THOMSON.

WITH ENGLISH SONG.

“ Forlorn, my love, no comfort near,” &c.

How do you like the foregoing? I have written it within this hour: so much for the *speed* of my Pegasus, but what say you to his *bottom*?

CLXVII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

WITH SCOTTISH BALLAD.

“ Last May a braw wooer cam down the lang glen,” &c.

AND FRAGMENT.

“ Why, why tell thy lover,” &c.

Such is the peculiarity of the rhythm of this air, that I find it impossible to make another stanza to suit it.

I am at present quite occupied with the charming sensations of the tooth-ache, so have not a word to spare.

CLXVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

15th Dec. 1795.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As I am in a complete Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the deity of Dulness herself could wish, I shall not drawl out a heavy letter with a number of heavier apologies for my late silence. Only one I shall mention, because I know you will sympathize in it : these four months a sweet little girl, my youngest child, has been so ill, that every day, a week or less, threatened to terminate her existence. There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father, for God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks ; me and my exertion all their stay : and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang ! If I am nipt off at the command of Fate, even in all the vigour of manhood as I am — such things happen every day — gracious God ! what would become of my little flock ? 'Tis here that I envy your people of fortune ! A father on his death-bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe enough ; but the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters in dependency and friends ; while I — but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject !

To leave talking of the matter so gravely, I shall sing with the old Scots ballad —

O that I had ne'er been married,
 I would never had nae care;
 Now I've gotten wife and bairns,
 They cry crowdie! evermair.

Crowdie! ance; crowdie! twice;
 Crowdie! three times in a day:
 An ye, crowdie! ony mair,
 Ye'll crowdie a' my meal away.

* * * *

December 24th.

We have had a brilliant theatre here this season; only, as all other business has, it experiences a stagnation of trade from the epidemical complaint of the country, *want of cash*. I mention our theatre merely to lug in an occasional *Address* which I wrote for the benefit-night of one of the actresses, and which is as follows:

“ Still anxious to secure your partial favour,” &c.
 See *Poems*.

25th, Christmas Morning.

This, my much-loved friend, is a morning of wishes; accept mine—so heaven hear me as they are sincere! that blessings may attend your steps, and affliction know you not! In the charming words of my favourite author, *The Man of Feeling*, “ May the Great Spirit bear up the weight of thy gray hairs, and blunt the arrow that brings them rest!”

Now that I talk of authors, how do you like Cowper? Is not the *Tash* a glorious poem? The

religion of the *Tash*, bating a few scraps of *Calvinistic* divinity, is the religion of God and Nature, the religion that exalts, that ennobles man. Were not you to send me your *Zeluco*, in return for mine? Tell me how you like my marks and notes through the book. I would not give a farthing for a book, unless I were at liberty to blot it with my criticisms.

I have lately collected, for a friend's perusal, all my letters; I mean those which I first sketched in a rough draught, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which, from time to time, I had parcelled by as trash that were scarce worth preserving, and which yet at the same time I did not care to destroy; I discovered many of these rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out, in a bound MS. for my friend's library. As I wrote always to you the rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you, except one, about the commencement of our acquaintance. If there were any possible conveyance, I would send you a perusal of my book.

CLXIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, IN LONDON.

Dumfries, 20th Dec. 1795.

I HAVE been prodigiously disappointed in this London journey of yours. In the first place, when your last to me reached Dumfries, I was in the country, and did not return until too late to answer your

letter; in the next place, I thought you would certainly take this route; and now I know not what is become of you, or whether this may reach you at all. God grant that it may find you and yours in prospering health and good spirits! Do let me hear from you the soonest possible.

As I hope to get a frank from my friend captain Miller, I shall, every leisure hour, take up the pen, and gossip away whatever comes first, prose or poesy, sermon or song. In this last article I have abounded of late. I have often mentioned to you a superb publication of Scottish songs which is making its appearance in your great metropolis, and where I have the honour to preside over the Scottish verse, as no less a personage than Peter Pindar does over the English.

* * * * *

December 29th.

Since I began this letter I have been appointed to act in the capacity of the supervisor here; and I assure you, what with the load of business, and what with that business being new to me, I could scarcely have commanded ten minutes to have spoken to you, had you been in town, much less to have written you an epistle. This appointment is only temporary, and during the illness of the present incumbent: but I look forward to an early period when I shall be appointed in full form; a consummation devoutly to be wished! My political sins seem to be forgiven me.

This is the season (New-year's-day is now my

date) of wishing: and mine are most fervently offered up for you! May life to you be a positive blessing while it lasts, for your own sake; and that it may yet be greatly prolonged, is my wish for my own sake, and for the sake of the rest of your friends! What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t'other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame. With all my follies of youth, and, I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself on having had, in early days, religion strongly impressed on my mind. I have nothing to say to any one as to which sect he belongs to, or what creed he believes; but I look on the man who is firmly persuaded of infinite Wisdom and Goodness superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment; a firm prop and sure stay in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress; and a never-failing anchor of hope, when he looks beyond the grave.

January 12th.

You will have seen our worthy and ingenious friend the doctor, long ere this. I hope he is well, and beg to be remembered to him. I have just been reading over again, I dare say for the hundred and fiftieth time, his *View of Society and Manners*; and still I read it with delight. His humour is perfectly original—it is neither the humour of Addison, nor Swift, nor Sterne, nor of any body but Dr. Moore. By the bye, you have deprived me of *Zeluco*: re-

remember that, when you are disposed to rake up the sins of my neglect from among the ashes of my laziness.

He has paid me a pretty compliment, by quoting me in his last publication.*

* * * * *

CLXX.

TO MRS. R * * * * .

20th January, 1796.

I CANNOT express my gratitude to you for allowing me a longer perusal of *Anacharsis*. In fact, I never met with a book that bewitched me so much; and I, as a member of the library, must warmly feel the obligation you have laid us under. Indeed to me the obligation is stronger than to any other individual of our society; as *Anacharsis* in an indispensable desideratum to a son of the Muses.

The health you wished me in your morning's card is, I think, flown from me for ever. I have not been able to leave my bed to-day till about an hour ago. These wickedly unlucky advertisements I lent (I did wrong) to a friend, and I am ill able to go in quest of him.

The Muses have not quite forsaken me. The following detached stanzas I intend to interweave in some disastrous tale of a shepherd.

* * * * *

* Edward.

CLXXI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

31st January, 1796.

THESE many months you have been two packets in my debt—what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess. Alas, madam! ill can I afford at this time to be deprived of any of the small remnant of my pleasures. I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until, after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street.

When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
Affliction purifies the visual ray,
Religion hails the drear, the untried night,
And shuts, for ever shuts, life's doubtful day!

CLXXII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

February, 1796.

MANY thanks, my dear sir, for your handsome, elegant present to Mrs. B * * *, and for my remaining vol. of P. Pindar.—Peter is a delightful fellow, and a first favourite of mine. I am much pleased with your idea of publishing a collection of our songs in octavo, with etchings. I am extremely willing to lend every assistance in my power. The Irish airs I shall cheerfully undertake the task of finding verses for.

I have already, you know, equipped three with words, and the other day I strung up a kind of rhapsody to another Hibernian melody, which I admire much.

“Awa wi' your witchcraft o' beauty's alarms,” &c.

If this will do, you have now four of my Irish engagement. In my by-past songs I dislike one thing; the name Chloris—I meant it as the fictitious name of a certain lady: but, on second thoughts, it is a high incongruity to have a Greek appellation to a Scottish pastoral ballad.—Of this, and some things else, in my next: I have more amendments to propose.—What you once mentioned of “flaxen locks” is just; they cannot enter into an *elegant* description of beauty. Of this also again—God bless you!

CLXXIII.

TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1796.

ALAS, my dear Thomson, I fear it will be some time ere I tune my lyre again! "By Babel streams I have sat and wept," almost ever since I wrote you last: I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of sickness, and have counted time by the repercussions of pain! Rheumatism, cold, and fever, have formed to me a terrible combination. I close my eyes in misery, and open them without hope; I look on the vernal day, and say, with poor Fergusson—

"Say, wherefore has an all-indulgent Heaven
Light to the comfortless and wretched given?"

This will be delivered to you by a Mrs. Hyslop, landlady of the Globe Tavern here, which for these many years has been my *houff*, and where our friend Clarke and I have had many a merry squeeze. I am highly delighted with Mr. Allan's etchings. *Woo'd and married an' a'*, is admirable. The *grouping* is beyond all praise. The expression of the figures, conformable to the story in the ballad, is absolutely faultless perfection. I next admire, *Turnim-spike*. What I like least is, *Jenny said to Jockey*. Besides the female being in her appearance * * * * if you take her stooping into the account, she is at least two inches taller than her lover. Poor Cleghorn! I sincerely sympathize with

him! Happy I am to think that he yet has a well-grounded hope of health and enjoyment in this world. As for me—but that is a * * * * subject!

CLXXIV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

I ONCE mentioned to you an air which I have long admired—*Here's a health to them that's awa, hiney*, but I forget if you took any notice of it. I have just been trying to suit it with verses; and I beg leave to recommend the air to your attention once more. I have only begun it.

CHORUS.—“*Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear,*” &c.

CLXXV.

TO MR. THOMSON.

THIS will be delivered by a Mr. Lewars, a young fellow of uncommon merit. As he will be a day or two in town, you will have leisure, if you choose, to write me by him; and if you have a spare half hour to spend with him, I shall place your kindness to my account. I have no copies of the songs I have sent you, and I have taken a fancy to review them all, and possibly may mend some of them; so, when you have complete leisure, I will thank

you for either the originals or copies.* I had rather be the author of five well-written songs, than of ten, otherwise. I have great hopes that the genial influence of the approaching summer will set me to rights, but as yet I cannot boast of returning health. I have now reason to believe that my complaint is a flying gout :— a sad business !

Do let me know how Cleghorn is, and remember me to him.

This should have been delivered to you a month ago. I am still very poorly, but should like much to hear from you.

CLXXVI.

TO MRS. R * * * * *

Who had desired him to go to the Birth-Day Assembly on that day, to show his loyalty.

4th June, 1796.

I AM in such miserable health as to be utterly incapable of showing my loyalty in any way. Racked as I am with rheumatisms, I meet every face with a greeting, like that of Balak to Balaam—"Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy me Israel!" So say I—Come, curse me that east wind; and come, defy me the north! Would you have me, in such circumstances, copy you out a love song?

* * * * *

* It is needless to say, that this revival Burns did not live to perform.

may, perhaps, see you on Saturday, but I will not be at the ball.—Why should I? “Man delights not me, nor woman either!” Can you supply me with the song, *Let us all be unhappy together*—do it if you can, and oblige *le pauvre misérable*.

R. B.

CLXXVII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Brow, Sea-bathing Quarters, 7th July, 1796.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

I RECEIVED yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention; a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bed-fast, and sometimes not; but these last three months, I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me.—Pale, emaciated, and so feeble as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled! fled!—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing, and country quarters, and riding.—The deuce of the matter is this; when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to 35*l.* instead of 50*l.*—What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself, and keep a horse in country quarters—with a wife and five children at home, on 35*l.*? I mention this,

learn-

1796.
in-
ked
with
me,
So
se,
ch

... an excellent copy on paper; it
must perish with hunger.

I have sent you one of the
memory does not serve me
copy here; but I shall be at
will send it you.—A-propos to
Burns threatens in a week or
to my paternal charge, which,
der, I intend shall be introd
the respectable designation of
Ann Burns. My last was Jan
can have no objection to the c
Farewell!

CLXXVIII.

TO MRS. BURNE

MY DEAREST LOVE,
I DELIVER...

ments to her, and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday. Your affectionate husband,

R. B.

CLXXIX.

TO MR. THOMSON.

Brow, on the Solway Frith, 12th July, 1796.

AFTER all my boasted independence, cursed necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel * * * * of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process; and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half-distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song genius you have seen. I tried my hand on *Rothemurche* this morning. The measure is so difficult, that it is impossible to infuse much genius into the lines; they are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me!

CHORUS.—“ Fairest maid on Devon banks,” &c.

CLXXX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Brow, 18th July, 1796.

MADAM,

I HAVE written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that "bourn whence no traveller returns." Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!!

R. B.

The above is supposed to be the last production of Robert Burns, who died on the 21st of the month, nine days afterwards. He had, however, the pleasure of receiving a satisfactory explanation of his friend's silence, and an assurance of the continuance of her friendship to his widow and children; an assurance that has been amply fulfilled.

CLXXXI.

• TO • • • •

THE partiality of my countrymen has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the poet I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I hope have been found in the man. Reasons of no less weight than the support of a wife and children, have pointed out my present occupation as the only eligible line of life within my reach. Still my honest fame is my dearest concern, and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of the degrading epithets that malice or misrepresentation may affix to my name. Often in blasting anticipation have I listened to some future hackney scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exultingly asserting that Burns, notwithstanding the *fanfaronade* of independence to be found in his works, and after having been held up to public view, and to public estimation, as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, dwindled into a paltry exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the lowest of mankind.

In your illustrious hands, sir, permit me to lodge my strong disavowal and defiance of such slander-

* The exact chronological place for this letter is not stated by Dr. Currie; it is therefore given at the close, as illustrative of the character and feelings of our author.

ous falsehoods. Burns was a poor man from his birth, and an exciseman by necessity; but—I will say it! the sterling of his honest worth, poverty could not debase, and his independent British spirit, oppression might bend, but could not subdue.

CLXXXII.

HISTORY OF THE RISE, PROCEEDINGS, AND REGULATIONS OF THE BACHELORS' CLUB.

“ Of birth or blood we do not boast,
Nor gentry does our club afford;
But ploughmen and mechanics we
In Nature's simple dress record.”

As the great end of human society is to become wiser and better, this ought therefore to be the principal view of every man in every station of life. But as experience has taught us, that such studies as inform the head and mend the heart, when long continued, are apt to exhaust the faculties of the mind, it has been found proper to relieve and unbend the mind by some employment or another, that may be agreeable enough to keep its powers in exercise, but at the same time not so serious as to exhaust them. But, superadded to this, by far the greater part of mankind are under the necessity of *earning the sustenance of human life by the labour of their bodies*, whereby not only the faculties of the mind, but the nerves and sinews of the body, are so fatigued, that it is absolutely necessary to have recourse to some amusement or diversion, to relieve the wearied man, worn down with the necessary labours of life.

As the best of things, however, have been perverted to the worst of purposes, so, under the pretence of amusement and diversion, men have plunged into all the madness of riot and dissipation; and, instead of attending to the grand design of human life, they have begun with extravagance and folly, and ended with guilt and wretchedness. Impressed with these considerations, we, the following lads in the parish of Tarbolton, viz. Hugh Reid, Robert Burns, Gilbert Burns, Alexander Brown, Walter Mitchel, Thomas Wright, and William M'Gavin, resolved, for our mutual entertainment, to unite ourselves into a club or society, under such rules and regulations, that while we should forget our cares and labours in mirth and diversion, we might not transgress the bounds of innocence and decorum; and after agreeing on these, and some other regulations, we held our first meeting at Tarbolton, in the house of John Richard, upon the evening of the 11th of November, 1780, commonly called Hallowe'en, and after choosing Robert Burns president for the night, we proceeded to debate on this question—*Suppose a young man, bred a farmer, but without any fortune, has it in his power to marry either of two women; the one a girl of large fortune, but neither handsome in person, nor agréeeable in conversation, but who can manage the household affairs of a farm well enough; the other of them a girl every way agréeeable in person, conversation, and behaviour, but without any fortune: which of them shall he choose?* Finding ourselves very happy in our society, we resolved to continue to meet once a month in the same house, in the way and manner proposed, and shortly thereafter we chose Robert Richie

for another member. In May, 1781, we brought in David Sillar,* and in June, Adam Jamaison, as members. About the beginning of the year, 1782, we admitted Matthew Patterson, and John Orr, and in June following we chose James Patterson as a proper brother for such a society. The club being thus increased, we resolved to meet at Tarbolton on the race-night, the July following, and have a dance in honour of our society. Accordingly we did meet, each one with a partner, and spent the evening in such innocence and merriment, such cheerfulness and good humour, that every brother will long remember it with pleasure and delight.

Rules and Regulations to be observed in the Bachelors' Club.

1st. The club shall meet at Tarbolton every fourth Monday night, when a question on any subject shall be proposed, (disputed points of religion only excepted,) in the manner hereafter directed; which question is to be debated in the club, each member taking whatever side he thinks proper.

2d. When the club is met, the president, or, he failing, some one of the members, till he come, shall take his seat; then the other members shall seat themselves; those, who are for one side of the question, on the president's right hand; and those, who are for the other side, on his left; which of them shall have the right hand is to be determined by the president. The president and four of the

* The person to whom Burns addressed his *Epistle to Davie*, a brother poet.

members being present, shall have power to transact any ordinary part of the society's business.

3d. The club met and seated, the president shall read the question out of the club's book of records (which book is always to be kept by the president), then the two members nearest the president shall stand up; the one on the left shall speak first, and according as the lot shall determine, the member nearest the president on that side shall deliver his opinion, and the member nearest on the other side shall reply to him; then the second member of the side that spoke first; then the second member of the side that spoke second; and so on to the end of the company; but if there be fewer members on one side than on the other, when all the members of the least side have spoken according to their places, any of them, if they please among themselves, may reply to the remaining members of the opposite side; when both sides have spoken, the president shall give his opinion, after which they may go over it a second or more times, and so continue the question.

4th. The club shall then proceed to the choice of a question for the subject of next night's meeting. The president shall first propose one, and any other member who chooses may propose more questions; and whatever one of them is most agreeable to the majority of the members, shall be the subject of debate next club-night.

5th. The club shall, lastly, elect a new president at the next meeting: the president shall first name one, then any of the club may name another, and whoever of them has the majority of votes shall be duly elected; allowing the president the first vote, and the casting vote upon a par, but none other.

Then after a general toast to mistresses of the club, they shall dismiss.

6th. There shall be no private conversation carried on during the time of debate, nor shall any member interrupt another while he is speaking, under the penalty of a reprimand from the president for the first fault, doubling his share of the reckoning for the second, trebling it for the third, and so on in proportion for every other fault, provided always however that any member may speak at any time after leave asked and given by the president.— All swearing and profane language, and particularly all obscene and indecent conversation, is strictly prohibited, under the same penalty as aforesaid in the first clause of this article.

7th. No member, on any pretence whatever, shall mention any of the club's affairs to any other person but a brother-member, under the pain of being excluded; and particularly if any member shall reveal any of the speeches or affairs of the club, with a view to ridicule or laugh at any of the rest of the members, he shall be for ever excommunicated from the society; and the rest of the members are desired, as much as possible, to avoid, and have no communication with him as a friend or comrade.

8th. Every member shall attend at the meetings, without he can give a proper excuse for not attending; and it is desired that every one who cannot attend, will send his excuse with some other member; and he who shall be absent three meetings without sending such excuse, shall be summoned to the next club-night, when, if he fail to appear, or send an excuse, he shall be excluded.

9th. The club shall not consist of more than six-

teen members, all bachelors, belonging to the parish of Tarbolton: except a brother-member marry, and in that case he may be continued, if the majority of the club think proper. No person shall be admitted a member of this society, without the unanimous consent of the club; and any member may withdraw from the club altogether, by giving a notice to the president in writing of his departure.

10th. Every man proper for a member of this society, must have a frank, honest, open heart; above any thing dirty or mean; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club, and especially no mean-spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall upon any pretence whatever be admitted. In short, the proper person for this society is, a cheerful, honest-hearted lad, who, if he has a friend that is true, and a mistress that is kind, and as much wealth as genteelly to make both ends meet—is just as happy as this world can make him.



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THE END.

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